



# NATIONAL'S FIREARMS SAFETY POLICY 2023



## Keeping New Zealand Safe

Over 225,000 law-abiding New Zealanders own and use firearms for legitimate purposes, like controlling farm pests, participating in recreational activities like hunting and shooting sports, and for some putting food on the table.

National recognises that firearms are important for many people, particularly in rural areas, to maintain the environment they depend on for their livelihoods. We also acknowledge the social and economic benefits that hunting and shooting sports provide in our communities.

There is a difference between those who are licenced and have a duty to use firearms responsibly and safely and those who do not hold a licence and use firearms for crime.

National's firearms safety policy ensures law-abiding New Zealanders can use firearms safely while refocusing law enforcement towards those that commit gun related crime. The current Labour Government has too often focused on responsible users at the expense of cracking down on unlawful users of firearms. National's policy will target the harm caused by gangs, criminals and those breaking the law.

A quality framework for governing firearms rules must begin with the development of robust firearms policy, and law, and then focus on the enforcement of these laws. That is why National will shift statutory responsibility for developing, administering, and implementing firearms law and policy to the Ministry of Justice. Justice has extensive capability to focus on robust firearms law and experience across many disciplines to ensure that both the lawful and illegal use of firearms is dealt with proportionately. At all times public safety will be at the forefront of their consideration.

Our Policemen and women do a very important job in keeping our communities safe. National will allow them to be relentlessly focused on ensuring that gangs and criminals do not illegally obtain and misuse firearms. That is why National will give the Police greater powers to proactively search for illegal firearms and remove them from the hands of gangs and criminals who pose a real risk to public safety.

National acknowledges that recent changes to the Arms Act 1983, combined with additional regulations, have resulted in some confusion and added cost for responsible firearms owners. There are examples of this around the licencing system and requirements upon ranges that do not always obviously enhance safety. National will refocus the Arms Act to work more effectively by relying more on primary legislation, rather than regulation, to determine firearms practice and to ensure New Zealanders are safer.

We believe that the knowledge and experience of respected organisations must be better utilised to develop effective firearms policy and to enhance safety and training for firearms users. National will give the Council of Licensed Firearms Owners (COLFO) a statutory role to represent the firearms community. We will also increase the engagement of approved clubs and organisations like the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association in outdoor and safety training for firearms users.

## National's Firearms Safety Policy highlights to make New Zealand safer:

1. Responsibility for the Arms Act 1983, policy and regulation will move to the Ministry of Justice (answerable to the Minister of Justice).
2. Police will focus on law enforcement against the illegal use of firearms with greater powers to proactively search and confiscate arms from gangs, including strengthening firearms prohibition orders.
3. Strengthen training courses, focusing on enhancing firearms and outdoor safety.
4. Firearms law will be predominantly set by primary legislation, with less reliance on regulations.
5. Commit to a full review and rewrite of the Arms Act 1983 after genuine consultation with New Zealanders.
6. The Council of Licenced Firearms Owners (COLFO) will be given a statutory role representing the firearms community.
7. Review all recent firearms policy decisions by the Labour Government to ensure they have improved public safety.
8. Firearms policy development will be based on responsible use of taxpayer money and reasonable cost to responsible users. National will not charge New Zealanders \$1,000 to obtain or renew a firearms licence.
9. The Ministers of Justice, Police, and Hunting and Fishing will be jointly responsible for firearms policy in respect of Cabinet decision making.



## National's Firearms Safety Policy

### National's firearms safety policy has four pillars:

1. The Ministry of Justice will assume statutory responsibility for firearms laws and policies and its implementation.
2. Proper powers for Police to proactively confiscate firearms from illegal users.
3. Review and rewrite the Arms Act 1983 after a genuine consultation with New Zealanders.
4. A formal role for the Council of Licenced Firearms Owners (COLFO) in the development of firearms policy and enhanced firearms training and safety.

### 1. The Ministry of Justice will assume statutory responsibility for developing, administering and implementing firearms laws and policies

The Ministry of Justice is well positioned to assume responsibility for developing and administering firearms legislation and policy. This will allow greater focus on policy that creates an enduring framework to govern the lawful use of firearms and the need for robust laws to keep New Zealand safe from gun related crime.

National believes Police should be allowed to focus on enforcing the law and combatting gun crime. Currently, Police are asked to develop, administer, implement and enforce all aspects of firearms policies. In no other area of law are police asked to be the regulator, administrator, and enforcer. Our policemen and women do an important job and deserve our respect and gratitude. National backs the police to make our communities safer and will give them the tools to do so relentlessly.

The Ministry of Justice will be accountable to the Minister of Justice regarding these new functions. To ensure the views of the Police and responsible firearms owners are fairly considered, the Ministers of Justice, Police and Hunting and Fishing will hold joint responsibility in respect of Cabinet decision-making.

The Government has already spent more than \$250 million on firearms policy to date and have estimated that they will spend an additional \$700 million over the next decade. They have also said upwards of half a billion dollars will be collected every 10 years to administer the Arms Act. National will only implement policies that will actually make New Zealanders safer.

For example, National believes the current proposal to charge hunters as much as \$1,000 to obtain or renew a firearms licence is unreasonable and excessive, as are the significant delays in renewing licences for existing retailers. This charge will not impact the behaviour of unlicensed firearms owners and those using firearms illegally. Gang members are committing more firearms offences under Labour despite rarely undertaking the lawful process to obtain a firearms licence.

National will be laser-focused on increasing public safety without imposing burdens and added costs on responsible firearms users that have no impact on public safety.

#### National will:

- Transfer responsibility to the Ministry of Justice for firearms legislation, policy and regulation.
- Establish joint responsibility between the Ministers of Justice, Police and Hunting and Fishing in respect of Cabinet decision making.
- Review all recent firearms policy decisions to ensure they will improve public safety.

## 2. Proper powers for Police to confiscate firearms from illegal users

The escalating level of gun crime committed by gangs poses a concerning threat to public safety. National unashamedly believes no gang member should possess firearms under any circumstances.

Alarming, Police intelligence indicates drive-by shootings orchestrated by gangs are on the rise. Not only are gangs using firearms as weapons more often, but an increasing number of non-gang members are the victims of these firearms crimes committed by gang members.

Despite National proposing additional powers for Police to search for and confiscate firearms through firearm prohibition orders, the Labour Government twice opposed passing these much-needed powers into law. To prevent gangs from acquiring firearms and terrorising communities, National will give Police stronger search and confiscation powers.

### **National will:**

- Prohibit gang members and their associates from owning firearms.
- Implement warrantless powers to search and confiscate firearms from gang members and convicted criminals.
- Make it easier for offenders to be disqualified from owning firearms where there is a risk to public safety.

## 3. Review and rewrite the Arms Act 1983 after a genuine consultation with New Zealanders

National supported the first tranche of the Government's changes to the Arms Act 1983, as a necessary step to enhance public safety.

However, the second tranche of the Government's changes to firearms laws imposed restrictions on law-abiding citizens that did not improve public safety. National voted against these laws when they were before Parliament because we believe that only laws that make us safer should be enacted by Parliament. After genuine consultation with New Zealanders, National commits to reviewing and rewriting the Arms Act 1983 to ensure firearms laws are fit for purpose and that public safety is enhanced, not merely talked about.

The reliance on complex regulations to implement firearms policy has resulted in confusion, expense, and uncertainty, often making it difficult for users to understand and authorities to enforce. National believes that where possible primary legislation, not regulations, should predominantly determine the rules for ownership and use of firearms.

### **National will:**

- Commit to a full review and rewrite of the Arms Act 1983.
- Reduce the reliance on regulations to determine firearms rules.



#### 4. A formal role for the Council of Licenced Firearms Owners (COLFO) in the development of firearms policy and enhanced firearms safety and training

National acknowledges the valuable expertise and knowledge held by the Council of Licensed Firearms Owners (COLFO) in representing the responsible firearms community. It is important that firearms users are fairly represented, alongside Police, to ensure the Government understands their perspectives and firearms policy is robust and enduring. That is why National will establish a statutory role for COLFO to represent the firearms community and give them an advisory role in the development of good firearms policy.

We believe more must be done to increase the effectiveness and accessibility of firearms training and safety courses. National appreciates that many clubs like the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association (NZDA) and Small Bore Rifle Association have valuable experience of how to use firearms safely. For instance, NZDA volunteers run hunts and range courses to transfer the skills that Kiwis need in the outdoors and ensure the highest level of firearms safety. National will deliver greater public safety through an increased emphasis on provision of safety and training courses – on an ongoing basis.

##### **National will:**

- Give the Council of Licensed Firearms Owners a statutory role in representing the firearms community and an advisory role in the development of firearms policy.
- Strengthen firearms training courses with a focus on enhancing safety.
- Better utilise approved clubs and organisations to deliver safety courses to firearms users.

##### **More to do:**

National recognises there is more to do to keep New Zealanders safe. This policy is just the first step and National will release our comprehensive law and order, justice and hunting and fishing policies before the 2023 election.

