

## Submission - Royal Commission into Family Violence

### 1. Background

I was bullied at home - as a child, as an adolescent, and as a young adult. It wasn't physical - it was verbal and emotional. My older brother was the culprit, and some (but not all) of the bullying and belittling took place with the knowledge of my mother, who seemed to find it amusing and would never criticise her son. We were the only two children in the family. The bullying was kept secret from my father, who would not have tolerated it. Because life had always been like that, it never occurred to me to report the situation to Dad.

The bullying sapped my self-esteem and confidence, making me an easy target for bullying in the workplace later on. When I gathered up enough courage to leave home in my mid-20s, my brother tried to dissuade me, telling me I should not try to become 'trendy' like other people because I never would be; telling me that if I moved interstate (which I did) I would be unbearably lonely, and telling me that many people committed suicide due to such loneliness. In short, he was fighting to retain his bullying 'sport'.

That was a few decades ago. However, one of the results is that I have more empathy for the vulnerable (including women, children, the elderly, the disabled, refugees, also pets and wildlife); I resent unfairness; I can readily identify **male schemes that bully, sometimes working in secret to get what they want, and fighting to retain their bullying schemes; and I resent the females who are complicit in such schemes.**

### 2. Role Modelling

Dr Sallee McLaren, a clinical psychologist, wrote an opinion piece on domestic violence that was published in The Age on 12 May this year.<sup>1</sup> It was controversial, questioning the victim's response when a male partner first raises his voice towards her, and then when he escalates his degree of anger on a later occasion, and calls her a bitch.

I don't intend to buy into the controversy surrounding the article, but I do want to point out that the man who is currently our PM seemed to take delight in bawling angry words in the parliament towards the previous, female PM. He later stood in front of signs calling her a man's bitch, while he addressed the nation at a rally against the carbon tax.

We can take the view that politics is tough, that this is all water under the bridge now - or we can stop and take notice. The fact that this man got elected to lead our nation, despite this appalling and ongoing public abuse of a woman, is very powerful and negative role modelling for the boys and men of this nation. He has never apologised for his actions. He had the insensitivity and audacity to appoint himself the Minister for Women. In my view, his recent expressions of concern for victims of domestic violence are therefore empty, politically expedient words.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-part-women-play-in-domestic-violence-20150512-ggzeii.html>, accessed on 26.5.15

Most recently, our PM is on record saying that the last thing he would do, is ban live animal exports, despite new evidence of Australian cattle being bashed to death (by repeated blows to the head) in Vietnam. The film footage was deemed too distressing to be screened on television, but this did not appear to trouble our leader. Apparently bashing is OK - at least for animals that earn dollars for Australia.

### 3. Other Men Behaving Badly

Most physical violence in the home involves threats/actions with fists, knives and/or guns. There may be drugs, alcohol and/or mental illness involved. Social disadvantage, poverty, lack of education, unemployment or under-employment, and homelessness, are known to increase the risk.

So what do governments (Victorian and national) do?

- They defend industries that are legal (but probably not helpful), such as the alcohol industry, the hunting industry, the gun and ammunition industry, the fights industry - even cage fighting - and industries that are violent towards animals (live exports; rodeos; hunting). They claim this will benefit the economy, but they fail to measure or acknowledge the social cost: **violence begets violence.**
- They slash funding to 'soft' areas such as education, health, community support groups, child protection agencies, legal aid, homelessness - because those most affected by these cuts are not powerful people who will speak out and embarrass the government. The victims of these funding cuts are struggling to survive; they are not organised as a group; they lack resources; they will generally lack education and clever strategies. In short, better to cut these areas than to increase taxes on the affluent, or to target tax-avoiders (corporate and private) because those groups are articulate, well-resourced and able to lobby effectively.

### 4. Secret Men's Business - Guns and Knives

For much of my life I have been unaware of the relentless campaigns by the gun lobby. The following information has come to my attention through work that I have done from time to time with a number of animal welfare groups.

In Victoria, successive state governments **actively promote and subsidise hunting and shooting as suitable activities for males, starting from age 12.** It's my view that **this promotion and funding of shooting and hunting to all and sundry will de-sensitise males to cruelty.** It is clearly intended to encourage the purchase and use of firearms and knives:

**"Outdoor sports such as shooting are a vital part of the social fabric and these grants will encourage more people to get more active in an environment that promotes safe and responsible firearms ownership"**

*- statement by the former Deputy Premier of Victoria, Mr Peter Ryan in a 2014 media release<sup>2</sup> promising funding of \$12.48m for a Shooting Sports Facilities fund to promote shooting.*

<sup>2</sup> <http://safga.org.au/wp-content/140718ryan-drum-coalitiongovernmentssupportssportingshooters.pdf>

**The media release goes on to promote hunting, but it conveniently omits to mention that hunting also involves knives.**

The media release takes the familiar line of promoting safety and responsibility, but I'm sure many would agree that the widespread promotion of guns and knives is particularly worrying in the current environment of increasing domestic violence and terrorism. Australian doctor, Tareq Kamleh, who joined IS recently, was keen on hunting, according to his social media sites<sup>3</sup>.

Incidentally, a new media release from Premier Andrews has confirmed taxpayer funding under Labor for the Shooting Sports Facilities program.<sup>4</sup> This is for 'safeguarding the future of sports shooting in Victoria'.

I will now list my main concerns about this 'secret men's business'.

a) **SECRECY**

Prior to the 2010 state election in Victoria, a fairly new and innocuous-sounding political party called the Country Alliance was quietly campaigning for the shooters. Its main policies related to a wish-list of shooters' demands. When the Baillieu/Napthine government was elected, it implemented a number of key items from that list (supported by the Labor Opposition), including:

- Creation of an independent statutory authority to promote and regulate hunting.
- Children from age 12, and foreign hunter-tourists, are encouraged to hunt, with the removal of previous fees and testing.
- Draconian penalties for duck rescuers. These also apply to any other non-shooters, who venture within 25m of the water's edge. This conveniently excludes the media and keeps the reality of duck shooting away from the public.

Most of the changes were brought in through the back door, after a minimal period of 'public consultation' for which not even a media release was issued to invite public comment. Government bureaucrats consulted with 14 different hunting groups. Hundreds of submissions flooded in from shooters, with the help of pro-formas from shooting clubs. The submissions appeared on a government website for a few months then vanished. Why the secrecy?

The tough new rules that adversely affected duck rescuers were inserted AFTER the 'public consultation' period had closed.

Secrecy is always a warning sign. Why the lack of transparency?

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<sup>3</sup> [Australian doctor Tareq Kamleh who joined ISIS was a party boy who liked crude pranks | The Advertiser](#)

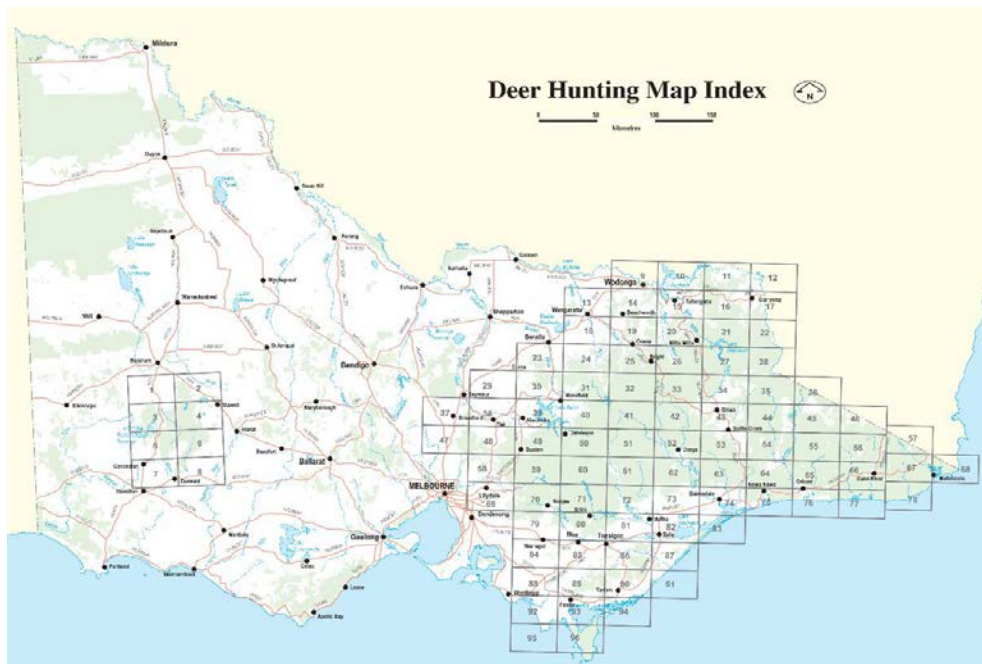
<sup>4</sup> <https://4a5b508b5f92124e39ff-ccd8d0b92a93a9c1ab1bc91ad6c9bfdb.ssl.cf4.rackcdn.com/2015/05/150527-Drum-Caught-Out-As-Labor-Government-Safeguards-Sports-Shooting.pdf>

## b) CRUELTY - Out of Step with Community Expectations

The general public dislikes cruelty. A couple of examples will illustrate this point.

- The public reaction against cricketer Glenn McGrath when photos emerged of him posing with his hunting trophies (slaughtered animals). Fearing a negative impact on his charity work, he made a pseudo-apology, while continuing to be a life member of the SSAA which supports African safari hunting and similar activities in Australia. The shooter community rallied around him, starting up a Twitter feed **#Illhuntwith you**, as an insensitive parody on **#Illridewithyou** (supporting Muslim women who felt unsafe riding on public transport while anti-Muslim feeling was running high in the wake of terrorism).
- The public outcry when a chestnut teal duck was found wounded by a blow dart in suburban Boronia in April 2013. There was condemnation of the cruelty, great concern at the bird's suffering, then relief when the duck was captured, treated, and pronounced capable of making a recovery.<sup>5</sup> Perversely, it is legal to shoot, wound and abandon a chestnut teal duck, provided it is done at a wetland in rural Victoria, during the 3-month duck shooting season.

And does the general public realise how widely deer hunters operate in Victoria? This map shows that they can operate over about half of the state<sup>6</sup>:



Times have changed since the 1950s and 60s. Families today would feel much safer knowing there were no guns or hunting knives in their home, and no guns or hunting knives in their street. Why can't guns be kept out of homes and stored securely at registries

<sup>5</sup> See for example this media report: <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/east/duck-needs-to-be-captured-and-given-urgent-treatment-to-survive-after-being-shot-in-boronia/story-fngnvlxu-1226599968918>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/image/0006/2004/map\\_index7.jpg](http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/image/0006/2004/map_index7.jpg)

staffed by police or security officers? Why do our state governments (both Coalition and Labor) promote and fund shooters and hunting?

c) **Promotion of Hunting is Promotion of Cruelty**

This point is best made by a former hunter quoted in the *Bendigo Advertiser* last year<sup>7</sup>:

"Many years ago I was a duck shooter and very much enjoyed the time spent. However, over time I, and several of the mates that I used to go duck shooting with, could no longer ignore the cruelty of the ducks that we shot that got away to die lingering deaths and the shot ducks still alive and in obvious pain left by other shooters who couldn't be bothered collecting.

"We still go camping but no longer shoot.

"We make a point of camping away from duck shooting areas, so those areas lose out on our dollars.

"I am sure that cruelty free camping brings in far more to the state than does duck shooting - and can be enjoyed by the whole family."

Relatively few of us non-shooters have had the courage to attend the opening of the duck shooting season, so we have not witnessed the carnage first-hand. Greens MP, Sue Pennicuik, is a regular attender and these are her words to the parliament, describing cruelty that is legal in Victoria<sup>8</sup>:

"The wounding rate and cruelty is unacceptable in the 21st century. Shotguns spray some 200 pellets, resulting in high wounding rates. We see legs shot off, shattered bills, splintered wings, pellets through eyes and shot lodged in organs, muscles and tendons.

According to US ballistics expert and shotgun user Tom Roster, the wounding rate is at least 1 in 4. This rate is pretty well recognised by everyone, including DSE<sup>9</sup>. Roster has told US duck shooters that such a high wounding rate is not acceptable. He has warned that if it cannot be lowered, American states will ban duck shooting, as has been done in the three Australian states of Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland."

Shooters are sensitive to public concern about wounding rates, so the government is using taxpayer funds at the Game Management Authority (the hunting promoter/regulator) to run a new shooter education program known as

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bendigoadvertiser.com.au/story/1997479/duck-hunting-proves-a-hot-topic/>

<sup>8</sup> Hansard, p1953: [http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/daily-hansard/Council\\_2011/Council\\_Daily\\_Extract\\_Wednesday\\_15\\_June\\_2011\\_from\\_Book\\_9.pdf](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/daily-hansard/Council_2011/Council_Daily_Extract_Wednesday_15_June_2011_from_Book_9.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> DSE: the former Department of Sustainability and Environment in Victoria.

Duck WISE<sup>10</sup>. It's a voluntary program; there is still no compulsory accuracy testing of licensed shooters, so no effective control over wounding rates.

Government has admitted that 'game hunting is often undertaken in areas that are not easily observed'<sup>11</sup>. So the violence and cruelty that take place are mostly unsupervised. Occasionally, offenders are found out, as in a recent case at Wangaratta where a phone revealed footage of the torturing of wounded deer. The shooter lobby leapt into damage control mode, denouncing the incident, but the real issue is that there is little control over the behaviour of hunters operating far away from the regulator.

Cruelty is violence, even when applied to the less 'attractive' species such as feral pigs. The practice of 'pig sticking' is illegal but it is happening with increasing frequency: perpetrators set dogs onto the animals then "jump on them and stab them with a knife"<sup>12</sup>. These perpetrators are members of the community, perhaps with partners and children.

It would be much easier to simply stop promoting and funding hunting as a suitable pastime for males. So why don't we?

#### d) Bullying the government

Shooters have bullied successive state governments into believing there are votes and economic benefits at risk unless they appease the shooters. In fact, the vast majority of the 88 local electorates in Victoria have less than 1 per cent of voters who are licensed game hunters<sup>13</sup>.

Last year's government report on the economic benefits of hunting was deeply flawed. It was based on unaudited guesstimates from hunters about how much they contribute to the economy when hunting. Average expenditure per duck turned out to be \$235, and for an even smaller bird, a quail, the average expenditure was \$240 - unbelievable results!<sup>14</sup> But with both sides of politics

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/education/duck-wise>

<sup>11</sup> Victorian Department of Primary Industries, *Wildlife (Game) Regulations, Regulatory Impact Statement, 2012*, p41

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/sport/victorian-police-and-rangers-have-revealed-pig-sticking-is-increasing-in-the-states-national-parks/story-fnkerdz1-1226976039884>

<sup>13</sup> RSPCA Victoria analysed postcode data for licensed hunters under Freedom of Information: <http://rspcavic.org/documents/Campaigns/RSPCA%20electorate%20-%20full%20data%20FV.pdf> The highest result for any electorate was for East Gippsland, where less than 3 per cent of voters were licensed game hunters.

<sup>14</sup> The average expenditure per animal shot is found by dividing the aggregate expenditure (eg for shooting ducks) by the annual kill tally. The former is found on p25 of the economic report [http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/4558/Estimating-economic-impact-of-hunting-in-Victoria.pdf](http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/4558/Estimating-economic-impact-of-hunting-in-Victoria.pdf) and the latter is found on p1 of a separate government report:

supporting the shooters, no one has had the courage or honesty to question the report. This is a serious indictment of the quality of our political debate and decision-making.

The previous government acknowledged that the arms industry would benefit from its liberalised rules on hunting<sup>15</sup>:

‘Many industries will benefit from game hunting, including those associated with the manufacture, maintenance, importation and retail sale of firearms, ammunition...’

It’s time we had a truly independent report on the social and economic costs of this industry!

Attachment A outlines a fascinating case study of how the shooting lobby badgered the former Coalition state government and clinched a deal on the eve of the 2014 election, to ensure that the site of a shooting range next to the Springvale Cemetery would be sold to shooters (regardless of who won the imminent election), with a promise of taxpayer funding for the purchase. Where was the transparency in that?

#### e) Robbing Peta to Pay Paul

Child protection is but one critical area that has been starved of funding while we lament the rise in family violence. I am personally aware of the difficulties experienced by the Department of Human Services’ legal team who try to defend the welfare of children in court. Caseloads are excessive; staff turnover is high; there is inadequate capacity to properly train and mentor new staff.

Meanwhile, the shooters are doing well. The previous state government in 2014 promised \$17.6m for the Game Management Authority over 4 years, plus a further \$12.48m for Shooting Sports Facilities, and then perhaps an unspecified amount for the purchase of the Springvale Community Sports Hub (aka shooting range). What else?

It seems the new Labor government intends to continue such levels of support for hunting/shooting. To my knowledge, the **total taxpayer funding across all portfolios for hunting/shooting in Victoria has not been routinely (perhaps**

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[http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/239372/ARI-Technical-Report-251-Estimates-of-harvest-for-deer,-duck,-quail-2013.pdf](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/239372/ARI-Technical-Report-251-Estimates-of-harvest-for-deer,-duck,-quail-2013.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Victorian Department of Primary Industries, *Wildlife (Game) Regulations, Regulatory Impact Statement, 2012*, p9



**ever) disclosed.** Why not, when critical areas such as child protection have been starved of funds for so long?

It's time to acknowledge and measure the social costs of this pro-guns policy. When WA, NSW and Qld banned duck shooting, their economies did not suffer, because hunters simply turned their attention and their money towards other recreational pursuits<sup>16</sup>. The economic argument in favour of hunting subsidies is a hoax.

**Shooters should be made to pay their way.** In 2012, game hunting licence revenue was estimated to be less than \$2m annually<sup>17</sup>.

- An annual duck shooting licence is currently only \$26 for a concession holder (half-price). For an extra \$13, a pensioner can hunt deer as well.
- Approximately one-third of hunters are juniors (with free licences) or pensioners<sup>18</sup>.
- A third of licensed game hunters don't even bother to hunt<sup>19</sup>; the cost of their licence must be just loose change in their budgets.

#### **Hunter licence fees should be increased:**

- to cover current taxpayer subsidies;
- to employ far more compliance officers to monitor hunter behaviour (duck rescuers seem to be the main compliance focus at present); and
- **to make a serious contribution towards reduction of violence in the community.** The arms industry and those who enjoy using guns and knives for 'legal' recreation must take some responsibility for the social impact from those who don't handle these weapons responsibly.

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<sup>16</sup> Australia Institute, 2012: *Out for a duck: An analysis of the economics of duck hunting in Victoria*, p2

<http://rspcavic.org/documents/Campaigns/duck/RSPCA-Out-for-a-duck-Dec-2012.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Victorian Department of Primary Industries, *Wildlife (Game) Regulations, Regulatory Impact Statement, 2012*, p8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p72.

<sup>19</sup> Discussed and referenced in section 4(f) of this submission.



f) Women politicians are complicit in this 'secret men's business'

As a woman, I'd hoped that the increasing representation of my gender in the parliament would result in some more balanced decision-making. Alas, the women on both sides of Victorian politics have failed to speak out against the bullying of the male-dominated gun lobby. Our female MPs in both Labor and Coalition appear to have been muzzled by their male political masters.

- Minister for Agriculture, Jaala Pulford, is shown smiling on page 4 as she commends the taxpayer-funded Victorian Hunting Guide 2015<sup>20</sup> that contains advertisements for arms and weapons suppliers, and a particularly disturbing photograph (p29) promoting hunting as 'family-friendly'. She quotes from the former government's report about the economic benefits of hunting<sup>21</sup>.
- Former Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Jacinta Allan, remained silent last year as the former government released its report on the economic benefits of hunting. Yet that report found a number of things worthy of comment/debate, for example:
  - o Hunting makes men feel 'confident' and proud' and this is good for their mental health (pp 59- 60)
  - o The regulator has sparse contact details for those it regulates (pp8-9):
    - an email contact address for only 2 in every 100 licensed hunters.
    - a phone contact for only 2 in every 3 licensed hunters.
  - o There are three outdoor recreation activities - camping, fishing, and bird/animal watching - considered equally or more important than hunting, by a majority of those surveyed. These are potential substitutes if hunting becomes unavailable, for example due to a ban, or unfavourable climate (pp 4 and 61-62).
  - o A third of the expenditure (economic benefit) claimed by duck shooters on hunting trips is for food and alcohol (p25). But there was no attempt to compare this with the amount of food/alcohol they purchase when NOT on hunting trips!
  - o 1 in 3 game hunters didn't actually hunt in 2013, yet allegedly spent \$2,000 on their hunting that year (pp 19-20)

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/3251/VHG-2015-FINAL-for-web-14FEB.pdf](http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3251/VHG-2015-FINAL-for-web-14FEB.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Op cit.

Are our female politicians aware of the hunting sub-culture for women? After all, male hunters like to encourage some female participation to make the 'sport' look more appealing. There is a Wild Women Calendar featuring women in provocative poses, partially clothed, and carrying guns; the 2015 version can be seen here:

<https://www.facebook.com/wildwomenhunt/photos/pb.707373359320020.-2207520000.1432736283./875039482553406/?type=3&theater>

These female MPs are parents (so are most male politicians). Are they concerned that kids are encouraged to attend hunting shows like the Shot Expo this month at the Melbourne Showgrounds<sup>22</sup>, where guns and knives are displayed and sold, and face painting and jumping castles are provided for children so as to 'normalise' the violence and make it 'family-friendly'? Do they really subscribe to the spin that 'game hunting activities have the potential to strengthen family and social bonds'<sup>23</sup> - that is, by shooting and knifing stuff?

## 5. CONCLUSION

I am not an expert on domestic violence and all its complex causes and manifestations. However, by sharing with you some of the information that has come to my attention, and why I am concerned about it, I hope to shed some light on the 'secret men's business' that is the gun lobby, promoted and supported by compliant women in politics.

I stated at the outset that my experience of bullying earlier in life had led me to readily identify male schemes that bully, sometimes working in secret to get what they want, and fighting to retain their bullying schemes, also that I resent the females who are complicit in such schemes. I hope I have highlighted some of these aspects in my discussion about hunting/shooting.

There is a real **power imbalance** between the male gun lobby and the rest of the community that is not organised to campaign against the relentless self-serving push from the weapons industry and its customers.

Let's find more constructive ways to entertain and engage our men and boys. Premier Andrews has publicly stated that 'nothing is off the table' regarding this Royal Commission into Family Violence.

- What about his pre-election commitments to shooters?
- What about deals to help him secure the support of the Shooters & Fishers Party in the Upper House where he lacks a majority?

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<sup>22</sup> Further details available from: <http://shotexpo.com.au/melbourne/>

<sup>23</sup> Victorian Department of Primary Industries, *Wildlife (Game)Regulations, Regulatory Impact Statement, 2012*, p9

This will be a real test of the Premier's commitment to tackling family violence.

My recommendations are listed below.

Let's value and protect our wildlife and then we might start to value and protect all vulnerable beings - women, children, disabled and elderly included. Unbridled abuse knows no bounds: violence begets violence.

## 6. MY RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Establish an independent statutory authority to promote the safety of women and challenge those powerful interests that contribute to violence in our society.
- ii. All submissions for regulatory change should address the potential impact on the safety and well-being of vulnerable groups. (There was a precedent for this at federal level - submissions for change were required to address the impact on small business.)
- iii. Make hunters pay their way.
- iv. Keep kids away from guns and knives:
  - No junior hunting licences before the age of 16 (as for driving a car)
  - No free hunting licences;
  - Only licensed hunters to attend hunting shows.
- v. Reduce wounding rates (and the cruelty of lingering deaths for wounded animals) by requiring all hunters to pass annual accuracy tests.
- vi. No guns or hunting knives to be kept at home. They could be stored securely at registered premises with records kept of when equipment was taken out and returned, and by whom.
  - This could be a new niche industry - storage and care of weapons.
  - Homes would be safer, and law enforcement easier and less costly.
- vii. Make a clear distinction between guns used for WORK and guns used for FUN.
  - Shooting as a 'work' skill (eg pest controller) should be taught and assessed under close supervision. Guns used for recreation should never target living beings.

## ATTACHMENT A

### Case study: How shooters successfully campaigned to have taxpayers provide a shooting range beside Springvale Cemetery

This is an example of relentless lobbying behind-the-scenes to get what shooters wanted, namely taxpayer funding to buy a shooting range that had been leased to shooters over many years, adjacent to the Springvale Cemetery. Political pressure was exerted on the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust, and the new lease (signed just before the 2014 election) effectively requires the Trust to sell the site to the shooters, regardless of who won the election. Taxpayer funding will come from two portfolios - Sports and Recreation, and also Health.

Part of this agreement was a name change: from ‘Springvale Range’ to ‘Springvale Community Sports Hub’. However, a recent drive-by revealed a non-descript brick building emblazoned with a huge sign saying : ‘Sporting Shooters Association Australia’; there was no clue to the wider community that this is now their sporting hub. Source: SSAA(Vic) President’s Report (Dec 2014 ), published in the Victorian Shooter magazine:

**A major step forward in securing our Springvale Range: a 21-year lease with an option to buy and substantial government funding for the purchase.**

Greetings fellow Members.

At the September Board meeting I was very pleased to be unanimously elected President of the SSAA (Vic). It is an honour to head the premier shooting organisation in the State. As President, it is my intention to carry on the good work of the very busy, previous three years and to consolidate the advances made in governance and finances. Part of my focus will be on continuing to improve communications between members and the Board and the State Office.

As most of you would be aware the lease on the Springvale range was to have expired in mid 2016 and we would have had to vacate the premises after more than 40 years. It would have included taking our ranges and buildings with us!

So losing Springvale was just not an option. That’s why towards the end of 2012 the CEO made direct contact with the Minister for Health. The Minister’s response was favourable and ever since that first contact the Board has been making slow but steady progress towards buying the site outright and achieving permanent tenure.

Three months after the first meeting we were in a position where the political will was there to sell the site to us. The matter then progressed to where we had to navigate the sale through the government bureaucracy. And that’s what has taken more than 18 months - one bureaucratic hurdle after another – including three property valuations, two land surveys, two different zonings, establishing the drainage area, eleven different government departments and a local Council to deal with. A very challenging time indeed.

Nevertheless the Board persevered and on Wednesday the 29th of October a lease-signing ceremony took place at the Springvale Range, or what has now come to be called the Springvale Community Sports Hub. The signing was attended by the Health Minister David Davis, Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (SMCT) CEO Jonathan Tribe, SSAA (Vic) Board members Rob Lemm, Lance Eastwood, Andrew Hepner, Phil Brown, Dave Schreck, myself and our CEO Jack Wegman. The purpose of the ceremony was to sign a new 21-year lease over the property. However, make no mistake! We are still vigorously pursuing the outright purchase of the site. Achieving the 21-year lease was definitely the best short-term outcome to be achieved before the State election caretaker period was called.

Importantly, the lease contains a clause which states that during the lease period the landlord (the SMCT) will do everything it can to facilitate the sale of the property to us. It is a clear signal to the new government – Liberal or Labor – that the objective of the arrangement is to transfer ownership to the SSAA (Vic). So the new lease not only secures our immediate future but also allows us time to pursue our aim of purchasing the property outright.

While finalisation of a purchase is frustratingly close, on any analysis of the options and with the upcoming election, entering into this lease has been a great outcome.

Further good news and most important, is the announcement that we have also secured government grant funding to assist in the purchase of the property. Again after substantial work at the highest levels, the government has decided to fund a large proportion of the sale with grant monies from the Department of Sport and Recreation. It means

we are far less likely to have to borrow from outside sources to secure the range.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe to the State Government without whose support we would not have been able to achieve this great outcome. And here we owe an especially big ‘Thank You’ to the Health Minister who not only supports the sale to us but also made sure we were in a strong position before the State election. And ‘Thanks’ too to the Minister for Sport and Recreation for the generous funding allocation.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work undertaken by the State Office to get us to this point. The challenge has been daunting and the result a credit to our CEO Jack Wegman.

Denis Moroney  
President