

# SHOOTERS UNION AUSTRALIA

## TOP-10 FIREARM MYTHS



1. **MYTH: Gun amnesties reduce the likelihood of gun crime**
2. **MYTH: Further gun regulation will reduce criminal use of firearms**
3. **MYTH: More legally registered guns will lead to more gun-related deaths**
4. **MYTH: Firearms cause more deaths each year than other weapons**
5. **MYTH: Licensed gun owners are responsible for most gun violence**
6. **MYTH: The 1996-gun laws were responsible for the decline in Australia's gun-related homicides**
7. **MYTH: The availability of guns contributes to suicide**
8. **MYTH: Most illegal guns are stolen from registered firearm owners**
9. **MYTH: Sporting shooting is a man's sport and not family-friendly**
10. **MYTH: All guns are designed to kill people and gun owners are prone to violence**

### 1. MYTH: Gun amnesties reduce the likelihood of gun crime

**REALITY:** Although Shooters Union Australia supports the concept behind gun amnesties and advocates for a permanent initiative, the effect of amnesties in reducing gun crime is grossly overstated. There is some value in the scheme for people who are worried about a firearm that has come into their possession or who want to do the right thing. People who have an old family heirloom, have been recently widowed and left with an unregistered firearm, or have failed to register their firearm in the past for fear of heavy penalties are most likely to hand guns in.

However, criminals who smuggle illegal firearms into the country or manufacture them domestically will not participate. Criminals pay thousands of dollars to illegally import and manufacture firearms and will not willingly give these guns up. It is therefore unrealistic to expect that a gun amnesty will reduce gun crime. The myth that gun amnesties will take criminal weapons “off the streets” is simply untrue, as nearly 65 per cent, or 14,000 of the 19,000, guns handed in during the recent [2013 Queensland gun amnesty](#) were simply re-registered and returned to well-meaning, law abiding gun owners with updated documentation.

### 2. MYTH: Further gun regulation will reduce criminal use of firearms

**REALITY:** People with a criminal record are already prevented from applying for a firearm licence or legally owning a gun, with licensed firearm owners required to undergo rigorous police checks and complete safety training classes. Criminals typically access weapons via the illicit firearms market and further firearm regulation would not prevent them accessing, or using firearms. Further firearm regulation would instead target law-abiding citizens, who already follow legal requirements to use, own and store their guns.

The Australian Institute of Criminology’s “[Illicit Firearms in Australia](#)” report released in October 2016, states “the illicit firearms market is driven in part by outlaw motorcycle gangs, Middle Eastern organised crime groups, and other groups engaged in trafficking illicit commodities such as drugs”. These groups access weapons via the illegal importation or manufacture of weapons or through theft.

### 3. MYTH: More legally registered guns will lead to more gun-related deaths

**REALITY:** [The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission’s “Illicit Firearms in Australia report”](#) found there had been a 9.3 per cent increase in the number of legally registered firearms in Australia between 2011 (2.75 million) and 2016 (2.89 million). It also found that the number firearm licences, (not necessarily representative of individual licensees) increased by 11.2 per cent between 2011 (734,000) and 2016 (816,000).

However, despite the number of legal firearms and licences steadily growing in Australia, according to [Australian Bureau of Statistics data](#) the death rate where a firearm has been used has continued to drop since it was first recorded in 1980, both before and after the Howard Government’s 1996 gun buyback.

#### 4. MYTH: Firearms cause more deaths each year than other weapons

**REALITY:** Knives, not guns, are the most commonly used weapons in homicides, according to the National Homicide Monitoring Program's [latest report](#). It found knives were responsible for 86 deaths in 2013–14, while beatings accounted for 37 deaths and guns for 32. Added to this, the report also confirmed that gun-related homicides have been steadily on the decrease, with a 63 per cent decline since 1989–90.

#### 5. MYTH: Licensed gun owners are responsible for most gun violence

**REALITY:** According to an Australian Institute of Criminology study, [“The Licensing and Registration Status of Firearms Used in Homicide”](#), more than 90 per cent of firearms used to commit homicides are not registered and their owners are not licensed. The report states: “In other words, those who commit homicide in Australia are individuals who have circumvented legislation and will be least likely to be affected if further restrictions on firearms ownership are introduced. Any further restrictions will most likely affect individuals who are the law-abiding shooters in Australia who have already made significant sacrifices in furtherance of public safety.”

#### 6. MYTH: The 1996-gun laws were responsible for the decline in Australia’s gun-related homicides

**REALITY:** The decline in gun-related deaths in Australia was already evident prior to the 1996-gun buyback resulting from the Port Arthur massacre. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) [“Firearm Deaths, Australia, 1980 to 1995”](#) report, the crude firearms death rate declined by 46 per cent over the 16 years between 1980 (4.5 deaths per 100,000) and 1995 (2.6 deaths per 100,000).

Data from the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) for homicide deaths from 1995 to 2012 shows the gun-related death rate continued to decline with only a few spikes following the implementation of the 1996-gun laws. If the downward spiral was due to the implementation of the 1996-gun laws, why did the previous year, 1995, have only 59 deaths or why was there an increase of 20 deaths from 2005 to 2006?

The latest AIC [National Homicide Monitoring Program report](#) shows there were 238 homicide incidents in Australia in 2013-14 compared to 307 deaths in 1989-90, bringing the national rate down to one victim per 100,000 people - the lowest since the program started in 1989. According to the report, knives were the most common murder weapon accounting for 86 deaths, while beatings were responsible for 37 deaths and guns were involved in 32 deaths – marking a 63 per cent decline since 1989-90. Based on the most-recent [ABS](#) and [AIC](#) data, the following represents the number of firearm-related homicides between 1980 and 2012.

Year	Deaths
1980	109
1981	87
1982	100
1983	92
1984	120
1985	97
1986	101
1987	96

1988	123
1989	80
1990	79
1991	84
1992	96
1993	64
1994	76
1995	59
<b>1996</b>	<b>98</b>

1997	75
1998	54
1999	61
2000	59
2001	49
2002	42
2003	38
2004	33
2005	26

2006	46
2007	34
2008	31
2009	30
2010	39
2011	41
2012	44

## **7. MYTH: The availability of guns contributes to suicide**

**REALITY:** The intent to commit suicide is not determined by the means, but by the individual. In the absence of a firearm, the individual is likely to find an alternative method. This is borne out by the statistics, with [ABS](#) data showing the standardised death rate from intentional self-harm increased between 2006 and 2015 as did the use of alternate suicide methods to firearms in Australia. Since the 1996 Australian gun buyback, firearm suicides have declined 74 per cent. However, [ABS data](#) shows that, although there was a decrease in the use of firearm-related suicides between 1992 and 2002, “conversely, there was an increase in hanging, strangulation and suffocation”.

[ABS data](#) shows hanging, strangulation and suffocation accounted for more than half of all suicides (54 per cent) in 2012. While poisoning by drugs accounted for 14.5 per cent of suicides, followed by poisoning by alcohol, motor vehicle exhaust, etc., at 8.5 per cent, compared to just 6.8 per cent resulting from firearm-related suicides. [The remaining suicide methods included drowning, jumping from a high place and other means.] These statistics suggest that firearm regulation has not helped to reduce the rate of suicide in Australia. It also indicates that the focus should be how the nation reduces the underlying causes of suicide, rather than the method.

## **8. MYTH: Most illegal guns are stolen from registered firearm owners**

**REALITY:** A [2014 Senate Inquiry into ‘The ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community’](#) found: “The hypothesis that illegal guns are mainly stolen from registered gun owners was not supported by the evidence presented to the Committee.” The inquiry also found “the evidence provided by witnesses including law enforcement agencies, confirmed that most guns used in the commission of crime do not originate from licensed firearm owners”. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission’s [“Illicit Firearms in Australia report” October 2016](#)” also found that only 9.2 per cent of weapons recovered against criminal activity were stolen.

## **9. MYTH: Sporting shooting is a man’s sport and not family-friendly**

**REALITY:** In Queensland, there has been an upsurge in recreational shooting and hunting, with the number of gun licence holders growing by more than 20,000 in the past decade. Since 2005, the number of licence holders has risen 15 per cent to 179,184 and the number of registered firearms has increased more than 40 per cent to 757,184 in 2016 ([ABC News Online](#)). Women make up one of the fastest-growing categories of shooting club memberships. Women excel in a range of shooting classes. Well before trap shooter Catherine Skinner and modern pentathlete Chloe Esposito shot their way to Olympic Gold medals in Rio, women’s interest in shooting had been increasing, with female membership of Queensland gun clubs doubling over the past five years. A much earlier role model was Athens 2004 Olympics Gold Medal clay target shooter Suzy Balogh.

## **10. MYTH: All guns are designed to kill people and gun owners are prone to violence**

**REALITY:** Licensed firearm owners are law-abiding citizens, who have a legitimate reason to own a firearm. They undergo rigorous police checks and complete safety training before they are eligible for a firearm licence. Law abiding firearm owners include sporting shooters, farmers, feral animal pest controllers and hunters. As for their weapons, many of the firearms that sporting shooters use are designed specifically for target shooting and use relatively low-velocity ammunition. Most sporting shooters’ firearms are not easily concealed and only appropriate for target shooting. Likewise, many hunting shotguns and rifles are specifically designed for hunting game birds or larger game.