

June 2020

Re: Response to the Order in Council gun ban from the Ontario Council of Shooters

I am writing on behalf of the Ontario Council of Shooters, the provincially recognized sporting organization, which has under its mandate, six active sport shooting organizations representing a large number of recreational and competitive shooters, who enjoy a wide range of shooting disciplines. The six organizations are:

- Ontario Provincial Trapshooting Association (OPTA)
- Ontario Olympic Trapshooting Association (OOTA);
- Ontario Skeet Shooting Association (OSSA);
- Ontario Rifle Association
- Maple Leaf International Muzzle Loading Association (MLIMLA); and
- ONTarget Rifle and Pistol Association.

Several of these organizations have century-old histories in the province of Ontario, as do some of the venues: The Hamilton Gun Club was founded in 1882 and recently hosted the 100th provincial championship on record; the Ontario Rifle Association was founded in 1868. Sport shooting, along with hunting, are intricately and firmly woven into the fabric of Canadian history and culture. Shooting sports are growing in popularity, with an estimated 1.4 million Canadians participating in 2018 with the number of gun licenses rising for the tenth straight year in 2019. More Canadian adults hold firearms licenses than play golf, hockey, soccer or baseball. In 2010, 1.5 million adults golfed whereas 1.85 million were licensed firearm owners.

The government's recent Order in Council gun ban has, despite the attestations to the contrary, severely impacted sport shooting in Ontario, and across Canada. The ban includes and now prohibits the use of firearms, which were until now, used in safe enjoyment by members of the aforementioned organizations – both recreationally and competitively.

Other organizations, individuals, and the opposition Members of Parliament have evidenced that this gun ban will be completely ineffective in its impact on the issues the government has set out to address. The Ontario Council of Shooters, on behalf of its membership, echoes those concerns. It is, however, our intention with this letter to point out the myriad of benefits of sport shooting and the complex ripple effects of no longer having these sporting opportunities for Canadians.

Gun clubs operate safely in and around every city and town across Canada, bringing with them a sense of community, while supporting conservation, environmental, and educational initiatives year after year. Members volunteer at their clubs to provide education, special events and fundraising for members of organizations such as 4-H, Cadets, Scouting, the Canadian University Shooting Federation Clubs, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and a variety of women's groups. Fundraising events at gun clubs provide additional financial support or sponsorship for local hospitals, charities, and shelters.

Across all shooting disciplines, there are participants who represent every demographic of Canadian citizenry, from the very young who are under direct supervision to the aged, all genders, families with multigenerational participants, across cultures and religions, where 'new to Canada' individuals participate alongside those who are Canadian-born or Canadians with a longer history in this country. Shooting sports are particularly accessible to those who have mobility issues, including those confined to

a wheelchair, with many achieving success in regular and para sport competitions. The positive impact of the shooting sports on their lives is immeasurable. One of the firearm varieties notably appearing in the recent gun ban, the AR platform, is one popular with youth, women and the disabled, as they are light, modular, flexible, easy to operate and accurate. The AR variety operates as any other legal firearm in Canada, with a limited capacity, and one shot per trigger pull.

New Canadians look to sport shooting as a way to integrate into Canadian society, whether it is an activity they participated in before coming to Canada or as a completely new experience to help them join a community. The support new Canadians report they receive from the firearms community goes beyond the sport itself; it provides a sense of belonging in their new country. Multigenerational families coming to the range together bridge the gaps and provide bonding opportunities that some families find challenging to organize.

Individuals participating in the shooting sports report innumerable mental and physical benefits. Shooting sports, are defined as high-concentration activities, and reward participants with an overall sense of mental well-being, increased focus, mindfulness, and patience. Participation in shooting sports, as evidenced by recent Canadian research [footnote], results in increased confidence for novice shooters, which in turn, translates to improved resilience, discipline, and self-efficacy in other areas of their lives.

These attributes were reported in a higher percentage of women than men in this study. Sport shooting is known to increase serotonin which contributes to reduced levels of stress and depression, and a marked improvement in the quality of sleep. To perform well, sport shooters must calm and centre themselves, achieving a simultaneous state of relaxation and focus. Twenty-first century skills touted as the most important for young people, including mindfulness, resilience, creative and critical thinking, and problem solving are among those skills inherent in sport shooters.

Shooting sports offer an abundance of physical benefits as well, including increased stamina, upper body strength, hand-eye coordination and control, balance, flexibility, improved posture, and core strength.

All of these mental and physical benefits are available to participants through lifelong engagement and enjoyment. Shooting sports emphasize education and safety as the first principles of participation, making it one of the safest, low risk sports available.

A recently released Canadian study, raised concerns about the decline in women and girls in sports, where one in three girls report leaving by adolescence, due to low confidence, negative body image, perceived lack of skill, poor perceptions of belonging, and not feeling welcomed. This leaves as many as 62% of females who do not participate in any sport at all. Shooting sports remove many of the barriers to participation for women and girls. In fact, at the 2016 Olympics, Team Canada was represented by two sport shooting competitors, both women.

Shooting sport participants are held to a high standard with respect to bullying, abuse, harassment, and discrimination, and have adopted formalized safe sport practices across all disciplines. Shooting disciplines were notably absent in a recent Canadian study reporting on sexual harassment in youth sports. Over a 20-year period, more than thirty different sports were found to experience sexual harassment within their organizations, that was reported, and charged resulting in over 200 coaches being convicted.

Sport shooters participate recreationally and competitively, locally, nationally, and internationally with Canadian representation in local winter and summer games, CANUSA events, the PanAm Games, Masters Games, Commonwealth Games, and the Olympics. Canadians have a rich history of medalling in all of these competitions. Participants and athletes travel to sport shooting events, forging life-long friendships, and serving as ambassadors across provincial and international borders.

With shooting sports venues and participants in every corner of Canada, the positive economic impact in the firearms and ammunition sector is significant. In 2018, the Conference Board of Canada conducted an survey with an unprecedented 35,000 respondents. The results of the survey estimated that sport shooting involved 1.4 million participants in 2018 (exclusive of hunting), which:

- Generated an estimated \$2.8 billion revenue
- Supported 14,500 jobs, many in small, family run operations;
- Contributed \$1.8 billion in GDP; and
- Generated \$868 million in labour income, which resulted in taxes paid into government coffers.
- The recent gun ban has negatively impacted many in the sport shooting industry, most notably retailers with millions of dollars' worth of inventory, which they are now prohibited from selling. By extension, the gun ban has directly resulted in businesses closures and associated economic impacts.

In summary, the evidence is clear that shooting sports provide significant and countless benefits to all Canadians. The recent gun ban does impact shooting sports in very critical ways, and the negative ripple effects cannot and should not be ignored. The Ontario Council of Shooters firmly opposes this gun ban, and any other which we feel only affects those who legally acquire and enjoy firearm sports. We implore the Federal government to reverse this Order in Council gun ban, and respond more appropriately to the criminal acquisition and the illegal use of firearms in Canada.

Emily Brown,

On behalf of the Ontario Council of Shooters

<http://www.ontariocouncilofshooters.com/index.html>

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References

Ontario Council of Shooters

<http://ontariocouncilofshooters.com/members.html>

The 5 positive mental health effects of gun shooting (2018)

<https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/the-5-positive-mental-health-effects-of-gun-shooting-cmtt/>

Mental benefits from high concentration sports

<https://hellograds.com/news/mental-health-benefits-sport/>

Top 10 health benefits of going to the shooting range (2015)

<https://www.healthfitnessrevolution.com/top-10-health-benefits-going-shooting-range/>

Amateur sports coaches and sexual offences against minors (2019)

<https://www.cbc.ca/sports/amateur-sports-coaches-sexual-offences-minors-1.5006609?cmp=newsletter-The+Buzzer+-+Monday+Feb+11+2019>

Canadian Women in Sport, Rally Report; Encouraging Action to Improve Sport for Women & Girls (2020)

https://womenandsport.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Canadian-Women-Sport_The-Rally-Report.pdf

Angling, hunting, trapping, and sport shooting: Leaving a large economic footprint (2019)

<https://www.conferenceboard.ca/research/angling-hunting-trapping-and-sport-shooting>

Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters: Federal government announces firearms ban (May 1, 2020)

<https://www.ofah.org/2020/05/government-ban/>

Attachment 1, from our National Sporting Organization

Shooting Federation of Canada, Letter to Minister Bill Blair re: SOR2020-96



Bill Blair

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON. K1A 0A6 Phone: 1 613 995-0284

Sent To: Bill.Blair@parl.gc.ca

May 6, 2020

Minister Blair

On behalf of the Shooting Federation of Canada, we are asking you to review and amend SOR 2020-96 as the regulation impacts Canada's target shooting sport athletes by banning firearms with bore diameters used in Olympic events and recreational shooting sports.

The Shooting Federation of Canada is the internationally recognized national sport organization that endorses safety in the use of firearms, respect in sport and the Universal Code of Conduct. Our organization is committed to the development of high performance target shooting sport athletes and to the growth of target shooting sports in Canada that can be enjoyed by the old, young, any gender, multiple ethnicities, and athletes with physical disabilities. Your Order in Council restricts these objectives.

We applaud your desire to strategically address violent crime and the use of firearms during a criminal activity. With that end in mind, would it not be better to start by reducing the number of illegal firearms in the country and establishing harsher penalties for those who illegally possess them and use them in commission of crimes? SOR2020-96, while punishing legitimate registered owners of firearms, does not address the problem of the illegal possession of firearms. It confiscates assets of legal firearm owners when the objective is reducing the number of violent and criminal activities using firearms. The emphasis should be on putting stronger penalties against those who illegally possess firearms and those who use them in commissions of crimes.

Previous legislation had a negative impact on our members and hundreds of clubs across Canada and we have lost many athletes, and had to persevere through many club closures. Our ability to develop high performing athletes for future major games (Continental events, World Cups and Olympic Games) is getting harder with each new restrictive legislation about firearms that impacts legal gun owners and ranges. It would help us immensely, if you would review and amend SOR 2020-96 and redirect your efforts to the problem of violent crime.

Please contact us if you would like any further explanation of our concerns are and how they might be addressed.


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