



Identifying the Value of Firearm Registration: Examining the case for registering firearms in New Zealand

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An international comparison supports the view there is a strong case for firearms to be centrally registered to facilitate tracing the ownership of specific firearms to individuals as part of an integrated registration/licensing regime.

Firearm registration serves to increase the accountability that firearm owners have for their firearms by linking firearms to licensees. There is evidence that when firearm registration is adopted as part of a comprehensive licensing regime it can have a positive impact on reducing firearm-related injuries and crime, that registration makes it more difficult for criminals to access firearms and that it may also help reduce suicide rates. International evidence also demonstrates the information from registration schemes is highly valued by police because it improves officer safety (e.g. when executing search warrants), supports criminal investigations (e.g. by tracing weapons recovered from crime scenes), and improves public safety (e.g. enabling seizure of weapons in cases of domestic violence).

Questions have certainly arisen with a number of registration schemes overseas, particularly with respect to the costs and the burden they can place on lawful firearm owners. This paper draws on learnings from overseas and notes a number of steps to minimise the establishment and operational costs of a registry, the importance of focusing on data integrity in the design of the scheme, that firearm registration needs to be modern and user friendly, and the need for supporting programmes to ensure widespread registration.

1. Introduction

This research paper examines the issue of firearm registration around the world in order to identify:

- a) the value of gun registration schemes, and
- b) whether there are aspects of registration schemes that may contribute to their success or failings.

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1.1 Background

Defining firearm registration in a New Zealand context

Of those states where firearm ownership is considered a privilege rather than a right,¹ New Zealand is an outlier in not registering individual firearms to individual owners. Dealers must keep a record of the guns they sell, but most guns are not required to be tracked in a central register to monitor changes in ownership due to private sales.

In this paper the phrase ‘firearm registration’ is used to denote keeping a record of certain identifying information of individual firearms and their owners in an official register. Under this concept firearm owners are subject to legal obligations to make accurate information available to the registry when they buy/sell a firearm and when their circumstances change (e.g. change of address). Any such registry would be available to enforcement agencies to be able to search for official purposes, such as tracing a firearm to an owner or to determine the number and types of firearms registered to an individual or household.

New Zealand moved away from efforts at universal firearm registration in 1983

New Zealand has previously had a piecemeal system of registration under the Arms Act 1920, which put in place a system to permits to procure firearms and an obligation to register individual weapons.

From the 1960s, the Police began to make greater use of what could loosely be described as a firearms registry. This consisted of the shotgun permits index in Wellington and 16 separate indices throughout the country containing paper copies of the registration of rifles, pistols and restricted weapons. However, this highly decentralised registry required considerable manual investigation to locate relevant information, had low compliance, and was assessed as being incomplete and inaccurate, with a police study showing 66 percent of entries contained inaccurate information.²

In 1983 New Zealand reversed its approach to firearm control. The system of registration was largely abandoned (except for handguns) in favour of a comprehensive licensing regime that focused on ensuring, as far as possible, that only fit and proper people had access to firearms.

This move away from licensing was informed by a Police conclusion that, although the registration of firearms would provide police with an invaluable investigative aid, there was no relationship between the registration of firearms and their control and there was no reason to believe the existing registration scheme could be effectively updated.³

A 1997 Independent Inquiry commissioned by the Minister of Police into firearms regulation (the ‘Thorp Report’) recommended that New Zealand shift to a combined licensing/registration system. The recommendation was not adopted by successive Governments.

Further information on New Zealand’s experience is outlined in Annex Two.

Firearm registries around the world vary in scope and cost

The world has certainly moved since 1983 when New Zealand decided to abandon universal firearm registration. Developments in IT makes tracing firearms more efficient and means that firearm

¹ I.e. the right to own a firearm does not have constitutional protection.

² ‘Review of Firearms Control in New Zealand’ Report of an Independent Inquiry Commissioned by the Minister of Police (June 1997), 13-16 [‘Thorp Report’].

³ McCallum (NZPNHQ), ‘Firearms Registration in New Zealand’ (September 1982).

registration can generate more useful information for police, while there is now much clearer evidence from overseas that firearm registries are having positive public effects.

Annex One contains descriptions of the key features of firearm registration schemes from a selection of relevant countries. New Zealand is certainly an outlier, with Professor Philip Alpers noting ‘New Zealand’s decision not to register 96% of civilian firearms makes it a standout exception, along with the United States and Canada.’⁴

Many countries have a system of firearm registration in place, although the nature of the scheme and the type of information it captures varies considerably. Registries vary in form from centralised databases with comprehensive records of the entire life-cycle of each firearm, through to records that are captured at a local level when an individual wants to purchase a new firearm or renew their licence.

As Annex One outlines, experiences with firearm registries are often contentious, particularly with respect to the costs they can create and the perception they unfairly target law-abiding firearm owners. Canada is the most well-known example of a highly politicised registration scheme, with the Canadian government disestablishing the registration scheme for long-guns (e.g. rifles and shotguns) in 2012 – a decision largely made on the basis of substantial cost-overruns from the project, despite a formal evaluation finding the registry was cost-effective. At the other end of the spectrum, Australian states and EU members have acknowledged the benefits from universal firearm registration schemes and are continuing to invest in improving their schemes.

2. Identifying the value of a firearm registration scheme

This section examines the impact of firearm registries around the world and concludes there is clear evidence that maintaining a register of firearm can be beneficial and cost-effective.

2.1 What is the purpose of registering firearms?

Before considering the value of registering firearms, it is necessary to consider the purpose of firearm registration – that is, what public policy problem might gun registration be trying to address?

In essence, mandatory firearm registration is designed to address a single problem: the difficulties that otherwise exist in tracing firearms back to their legal owner. By linking firearms to owners, ultimately gun registries are intended to make it harder for criminals to possess firearms and to reduce firearm-related crimes, injuries and deaths.

Registries have been adopted around the world as part of a broader effort to strengthen the personal responsibility of firearm owners and to consequently reduce the availability of firearms to criminals and those not entitled to possess them. Enabling police to trace firearms back to their original owners strengthens the incentives on firearm owners to report when weapons are stolen,⁵ reduces the

⁴ The Guardian, ‘New Zealand Gun Laws Face Scrutiny After Christchurch Attack’ (15 March 2019). Philip Alpers is founding director of GunPolicy.org, a global project of the Sydney School of Public Health, which compares armed violence, firearm injury prevention and gun law across 350 jurisdictions world-wide. He is accredited to the United Nations small arms Programme of Action and participates in the UN process as a member of the Australian government delegation.

⁵ For example, a firearm theft may be not be reported if the theft was facilitated by the owner failing to observe safe storage requirements. However, with a registration scheme the police would be able to link the firearm back to the owner (if it was recovered or used in a crime), meaning owners would be strongly incentivised to report the theft when it occurs.

likelihood of 'straw purchasing' where a purchaser buys a firearm on behalf of a prohibited purchaser, and increases the incentives for owners to comply with all legal requirements when conducting private sales.

Gun registries are typically meant to be an easily accessible tool for law enforcement agencies to trace firearms to individuals. Registries can give police officers critical information about the firearms owned by specific individuals in order to support their day-to-day operations (e.g. executing search warrants) and can also support the enforcement of existing firearm laws and licences (e.g. targeting 'safe storage' inspections by taking into account the nature and number of firearms owned by an individual).

In the absence of firearm registration, it can be challenging for the police to:

- trace a firearm used in a crime to their last known legal owner,
- seize all firearms from those who are no longer permitted to possess them, e.g. following criminal convictions, revocation of a licence, domestic violence restraining orders,
- investigate unlawful transfers of firearms, and
- identify and return stolen firearms.

Over the long-term, registries can also provide valuable data on trends and help inform public policy development and the monitoring of policy interventions.

2.2 Firearm registration schemes can be effective policy tools

There is little question that firearm registration schemes can be effective public policy tools, provided they are set up and operated efficiently. Of note, two substantial evaluations have concluded that the benefits derived from firearm registration outweigh the associated costs:

- An evaluation of the Canadian firearm registration scheme concluded that 'the Canadian Firearms Program is cost-effective in reducing firearms-related crime and promoting public safety through universal licensing of firearms owners and registration of firearms in Canada.'⁶
- An evaluation of the EU Firearms Directive concluded the direct costs associated with the 'marking and traceability' element of the EU Directive (requiring registration and establishment of a computerised filing system for firearms) were reasonable in light of the benefits that were generated.⁷

Isolating the direct impact from registration on injuries/deaths is challenging

International experience demonstrates that the introduction of firearms registration schemes, as part of a broader regulatory response, can have a positive impact on firearm related deaths/injuries.

However, it is very difficult to isolate and quantify any direct correlation between the establishment of a firearm registration scheme and firearm-related deaths/injuries. This is because where registration schemes have been enacted they have been implemented as part of a comprehensive legislative package of gun licensing measures. For example, Statistics Canada was unable to quantify

⁶ Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 'RCMP Canadian Firearms Program: Program Evaluation' (February 2010).

⁷ European Commission, 'Evaluation of the Firearms Directive' (December 2014).

the impact of the long-running Canadian firearm registry, stating that ‘the specific impact of the firearms program or the firearms registry cannot be isolated from other factors.’⁸

A 2010 study published by the National Public Health Institute of Quebec credited the introduction of firearm registration *and* a licensing regime with, on average, a decrease of 300 firearm deaths each year in Canada (including 250 suicides).⁹ This study did not assess the extent to which this impact was attributable to either registration or licensing in isolation.

However, based on the experience from other jurisdictions, it is reasonable to conclude that the introduction of mandatory firearm registration (and supporting IT infrastructure to facilitate access to this information by interested in authorities) has had a positive impact on reducing firearm-related injuries and crime. The following sections outline this impact in more detail.

Registration makes it more difficult for criminals to access firearms

Firearm registration means that selling or lending a firearm to an unlicensed person carries with it a much greater risk of detection than under the present system. Knowing that a gun is registered provides a disincentive to professional criminals who might consider stealing it, because registration could subsequently link them to the theft.

Associate Professor Philip Alpers from the University of Sydney has commented that the registration of firearms was the most controversial aspect of the Australia’s approach to regulating firearms following the Port Arthur massacre, but that it was probably the most important change that was made.¹⁰ In his view, a key benefit from firearm registration is that it makes each person individually responsible for every firearm in their possession. Prior to the National Firearms Agreement (NFA) there used to be approximately 10,000 firearm thefts a year in Australia; once the nationwide registration scheme was in place – and firearms became more traceable and owners were obliged to report thefts to police – thefts fell to approximately 1,500 a year.¹¹

A study funded by John Hopkins University in Baltimore traced data on all ‘crime guns’¹² recovered in 27 cities in 23 US states to determine whether there was an association between licensing and registration of firearm sales and gun availability to criminals.¹³ The study concluded that states with both licensing systems *and* mandatory registration do a better job than other states of preventing guns initially sold within the state from being used/recovered in crimes (i.e. criminals using firearms were forced to source their firearms elsewhere). Of note:

- 33.7% of crime guns were first sold within the state by gun dealers in cities with both registration *and* licensing,

⁸ Statistics Canada document tabled in Parliament during Oral Questions (Question 19), 29 November 2004, Hansard No. 034.

⁹ Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, ‘Mémoire déposé au Comité permanent de la sécurité publique et nationale de la Chambre des communes sur le projet de loi C-391, Loi modifiant le Code criminel et la Loi sur les armes à feu’ (May 2010).

¹⁰ Charis Chang, ‘Australia’s gun laws are not as strict as they should be’ New Zealand Herald (30 March 2019)

¹¹ Figures compiled from state and territory police records and published by federal agencies, with analysis reported by Philip Alpers.

¹² Defined as ‘illegally possessed, used in a crime, or suspected to have been used in a crime’. This captured 108,000 firearms.

¹³ Webster, Vernick and Hepburn, ‘Relationship between licensing, registration, and other gun sales laws and the source state of crime guns’ *Injury Prevention* (2001), 7:184.

- 72.7% of crime guns were first sold within the state by gun dealers in cities that had registration or licensing, but not both,¹⁴ and
- 84.2% of crime guns were sold within the state by gun dealers in cities without registration or licensing.

The evidence from this John Hopkins study indicates that a combined licensing/registration regime makes it much more difficult for people who subsequently commit crimes to obtain their firearms (including from in-state dealers, acquaintances or homes that are burglarised). As a licensing/registration scheme creates barriers to firearm access for criminals, they are forced to try to source their firearms elsewhere – which in the United States means nearby states with fewer gun controls. The findings also suggest ‘state level gun control measures may not have a substantial impact on criminal gun availability unless the measures are very comprehensive, including both licensing, registration and other restrictions.’¹⁵

The introduction of firearm registration in the European Union has also been credited with making it more difficult for criminals to access and traffic firearms. A comprehensive evaluation in 2014 of the EU’s Firearms Directive, which, amongst other aspects, required member states to register firearms and create a database for accessing this information (more information in Annex One), concluded:¹⁶

‘the level of security and protection against criminal acts and illicit trafficking has been improved mainly through the introduction of additional tracing requirements for [Member States’] competent authorities (i.e., establishment of the computerised data filing system in which all firearms subject to the Directive shall be recorded) and for dealers (i.e., the maintenance of a register of all firearms transactions).’

The Canadian experience of abolishing its federal long-gun register in 2012 (retaining it for handguns and prohibited weapons) provides an opportunity to isolate some of the changes that might be attributable to firearm registration. Trends since the abolition of this register indicate that a registration scheme can help reduce gun-related harm:

- Statistics Canada observed in 2018 that ‘Firearm-related violent crime declined 33% from 2009 to 2013, reaching its lowest point in recent years. The downward trend stopped in 2013 and, since then, it has gone up 42%.’¹⁷
- Break-ins where the intent was to steal a firearm have sharply increased, from 743 in 2013 (2.8 per 100,000 population) to 1,116 in 2016 (a rate of 4.0).¹⁸ In the absence of a register it can be very difficult to determine whether a firearm is the property of a given individual, which may make firearm thefts more attractive proposition.

Police highly value the data captured by firearm registration schemes

A key rationale for adopting firearm registration is that it can provide valuable information to police in their day-to-day operations. This objective is borne out by evidence from overseas.

¹⁴ The average was 69.5% for cities with only licensing and 74.2% for cities with only registration.

¹⁵ Webster, Vernick and Hepburn, above n 13, 188.

¹⁶ European Commission, above n 7.

¹⁷ Statistics Canada, ‘Firearm-related Violent Crime in Canada, 2009 to 2017’ (27 August 2018).

¹⁸ Statistics Canada, ‘Firearms and Violent Crime in Canada 2016’ (28 June 2018).

Prior to the disestablishment of the Canadian long-gun registration scheme in 2012, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police strongly made the case that it provided valuable information to police:¹⁹

‘The Register of firearms is very useful for the judiciary and police, because it improves officer safety, support for investigations (ability to trace weapons, affidavits for prosecution) and improving public safety (firearms seized in cases of domestic violence or mental disturbance).’

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) also reiterated the importance of the registry to its membership in maintaining public safety:²⁰

‘All guns are potentially dangerous, all gun owners need to be licensed, all guns need to be registered, and gun owners need to be accountable for their firearms. The CACP supports any efforts to improve the efficiency of the gun control registry system that can be achieved without jeopardizing public safety.’

The results from a Canadian survey of police officers confirmed that officers valued the information from the registry and it had a significant impact on their day to day functions, especially on service calls that could involve violence or firearms. 74% of general duty police officers found that registry ‘query results have proven beneficial during major operations’.²¹ 69% of officers stated that results from querying the register influence the manner in which they respond to calls for service.

A 2010 evaluation of the Canadian firearm registration scheme also demonstrated registration assisted with police investigative methods, by enabling them to trace the origin of recovered weapons. It noted that a significant proportion of firearms being recovered from crime scenes had indeed been registered: the majority of firearms were non-restricted weapons (79.7%) and of those 46.5% of weapons had been registered.²² Figures for Quebec show that over the 20 years to 2011, 54.3% of weapons seized by police after a crime or a suicide were registered.²³ These figures undermine a common criticism that firearm registries are ineffective because ‘criminals won’t register their guns’.

The Canadian evaluation also documented a number of examples where registration supported police interventions, including supporting family members to remove firearms from suicidal relatives and supporting a warrant to recover nine firearms weapons from an individual who had threatened to shoot a co-worker.

Furthermore, prior to its disestablishment there was evidence that the firearm registry was becoming more useful to Canadian police officers. The number of average daily searches by law-enforcement authorities on the Canadian Firearms Registry On-line increased from 1,813 in 2003 to 18,555 in 2012 when the long-gun registry was abolished.²⁴

It also appears that Australian enforcement agencies value the data generated by firearm registries. The total number of annual searches made by relevant authorities of a national firearms database²⁵

¹⁹ Translated from Gendarmerie Royale du Canada, ‘Programme canadien des armes à feu de la GRC: Evaluation’ (February 2010).

²⁰ Royal Canadian Mounted Police, above n 6, 47.

²¹ Canada Firearms Centre, ‘2007 Canadian Firearms Registry Online’ (8 May 2008).

²² Royal Canadian Mounted Police, above n 6.

²³ Eric Thibault, ‘Long Weapons More Used for Crimes’ *Le Journal de Montreal* (20 February 2016).

²⁴ Royal Canadian Mounted Police, ‘Facts and Figures’. Archived pages retrieved through Way Back Machine (<https://web.archive.org/web/20110104165438/http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm>) and (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130626204201/http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm>).

²⁵ The National Firearm Licensing and Registration System.

(i.e. effectively 'inter-state' and not just their state registry) increased from 163,000 searches in 2011/12²⁶ to 205,298 searches in 2017/18.²⁷

There are indications firearm registration can reduce suicide rates

A 2011 study sought to determine the extent to which gun control measures in the United States had effects on suicide rates by examining suicide data from all fifty states over the preceding 10 years.²⁸ As has been demonstrated in numerous studies, gun availability has a statistically significant effect on suicide rates. Interestingly for the purposes of this paper, when a state had firearm registration in place there was evidence that the population was statistically less likely to commit suicide by firearm:

'...if a state requires handgun permits and handgun registration, holding all other factors constant, then that state's overall suicide rate is on average 14.8 percent less than a state that does not have these gun control measures.'

The study also concluded that requiring handguns to be registered was correlated with higher rates of non-gun suicides, noting 'requiring registration for handguns may create enough of a barrier to obtaining a gun that individuals who want to commit suicide in these states may be forced to seek another method.' This method-switching is important given the relative high lethality of firearms when suicide attempts are made.

Literature reviews provide further evidence for a comprehensive approach to gun control

Although there is no peer-reviewed literature that quantifies the impact of standalone firearm registration schemes, there is considerable evidence that such registration schemes, as part of a broader package of gun-control, can have a positive impact.

A comprehensive review of 130 studies in 10 countries was published in 2016 by researchers at Columbia University to help assess how effective laws limiting access to firearm were in reducing deaths.²⁹ The authors concluded 'the simultaneous implementation of laws targeting multiple elements of firearms regulations reduced firearm-related deaths in certain countries'. The authors also note the 'aggregated individual effects' of multiple laws simultaneously implemented (e.g. the NFA in Australia).

In 2018 a substantial literature review by the non-partisan RAND Corporation was published in the United States.³⁰ This publication noted that no research was identified that examined the relationship between firearm sales reporting and recording requirements and the policy outcomes being considered (e.g. suicide, violent crime etc.). The publication concluded there was evidence that some specific gun policies were having positive effects, in particular background checks, child access prevention laws, minimum age requirements, and prohibitions associated with mental illness.

²⁶ Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission 'CrimTrac Annual Report 2013-14'.

²⁷ Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission 'Annual Report 2017-18'.

²⁸ Mark Gius, 'The Effects of Gun Ownership Rates and Gun Control Laws on Suicide Rates' *New York Economic Review* (2011).

²⁹ Santaella-Tenorio, Cerdá, Villaveces, Galea, 'What Do We Know About the Association Between Firearm Legislation and Firearm-Related Injuries' *Epidemiologic Reviews* (February 2016).

³⁰ RAND Corporation 'The Science of Gun Policy: A Critical Synthesis of Research Evidence on the Effects of Gun Policies in the United States' (2018).

3. Key indicators of success with firearm registration

This section of the paper draws upon the country-by-country analysis in Annex One to identify the learnings and issues that have arisen in the set-up and operation of firearm registration schemes.

While firearm registration schemes can be used to achieve valuable public policy goals, international experience demonstrates that the success or otherwise of firearm registration depends on how they are designed and operated.

3.1 There are clearly identifiable aspects of a registry that should be adopted and avoided

An analysis of international firearm registration schemes has highlighted a number of key factors that need to be present for a registration scheme to function effectively. A registration scheme needs to be:³¹

1. cost effective,
2. designed with a focus on data integrity,
3. modern and user friendly, and
4. supported by incentives/sanctions and awareness-raising programmes

The lessons from overseas in these areas are discussed in turn below.

Minimising the establishment and operational costs is essential to a viable registration scheme

One of the biggest risks to the cost-effectiveness of a firearm registration scheme is that there are spiralling implementation and operational costs, which significantly erode public support for the scheme.

The key lessons from overseas in avoiding high-cost registration schemes include:

1. Ideally, a fit-for-purpose and standalone registry would be created, rather than trying to initially save costs by bolting together the functionality from existing licensing/permits databases. As has been evidenced in Australia and Canada, such a piecemeal approach inevitably leads to data issues (e.g. duplication, inconsistent standards, gaps), which drive costs as more and more staff are required to clean-up and interrogate the data – and at some point, will likely lead to costly database upgrades.
2. The establishment, operation and data-input for the registry should be centralised and controlled by a single entity. Decentralisation is a significant driver of costs (e.g. Australian federal database, Canada, and New Zealand pre-1983):
 - Significant costs have been incurred from trying to address the interoperability of different databases, and
 - Decentralisation drives costs by creating data issues, due to different standards, error rates in applications and varying controls over the data. For example, in Germany, 550 local authorities have the ability to feed information into the registry, which has led to a lack of standardisation and made registry searches less effective

³¹ These are an updated version of the principles espoused in the Thorp Report that a firearm registry should include: modern, efficient and user-friendly management; government funding of the establishment costs; the involvement of firearms users in the planning processes; technical systems to enhance the integrity of the data; and effective publicity and educational programmes.

3. IT costs are the most significant portion of registry costs overseas, which emphasises the need to draw upon learnings from previous Government-run large IT projects – with rigorous and realistic scoping, tight project management and governance, and appropriate allocation of risk.

As outlined in Annex One, it is essential that the set-up and operation of any registry resides with the Police. A key factor in the significant costs associated with the Canadian registry is that a new entity was established to set up and run the registry – and the organisation did not yet have the governance, frameworks and contracting disciplines in place to efficiently deliver and operate such a large IT project.

Design of a registration scheme needs to focus on ensuring data integrity

As outlined in Annex One, a key problem that can arise with firearm registration schemes is that the information that is held in them is of such poor quality that they are of little value to enforcement agencies. Schemes such as those in New South Wales and Western Australia have been heavily criticised for having inaccurate, duplicate and incomplete information, which compromises the integrity of the databases.

Databases experiencing data integrity issues were typically designed with a lack of control as to how data should initially be entered into the registry. Key aspects of these lack of controls include the lack of standardisation in firearm descriptions, being heavily reliant on manual data entry, the use of free-text fields for data entry within the database, and not validating critical data prior to its entry in the database.

Evidence shows that a successful firearm registration scheme requires:³²

1. accurate data recording:
 - a. the most essential data to capture to facilitate subsequent tracing is the serial number and description of other classifying features of the firearm (make, model, calibre, action)
 - b. minimise the extent to which the initial capture of firearm data can be done through handwritten forms (numerous problems have arisen with misreading or spelling mistakes)
 - c. minimise manual entry when transferring information from application to database
 - d. comprehensive training is needed for registry personnel responsible for extracting identifying information about a firearm
2. standardised data capture:
 - a. the use of free-text fields within the database should be minimised as it has been shown to generate inconsistent treatment of the same information and human errors
 - b. the database should be supported by standardised templates and filtering functions to minimise discretion open to those entering data on the registry and to facilitate ease of searching
3. the registry database should be able to cross-reference registration and licensing records with firearm incident and offence data (the absence of this functionality, coupled with

³² A useful summary of how to minimise data integrity issues can be found in Bricknell S. 'Firearm trafficking and serious and organised crime gangs' *Research and public policy series* - Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology (2012) No. 116.

inconsistencies in firearm classifications has been highlighted as a major weakness in the national overview of firearm registries in Australia³³).

4. the desired reporting functionality of the registry (now and in the future) need to be part of the initial design of registry to maximise usefulness to enforcement agencies and minimise the cost of future IT changes
5. strict logs and controls are important to monitor and limit who can access and amend information

Firearm registration needs to be modern and user friendly

A conclusion of the Thorp report remains just as relevant today that, 'if such a system is to achieve an appropriately high rate of compliance, its introduction must involve as little effort and expense to shooters as can be arranged.'³⁴

Reducing barriers to participation by firearms owners is important to encouraging participation. A user-friendly registry would be digitised, have a consumer-facing online portal to accept initial registration information, and be developed in conjunction with technical experts and firearm users.

A registration scheme requires supporting programmes to ensure coverage

A registration scheme will only be effective if firearm owners co-operate. A successful registry needs to capture information on a high percentage of firearms and the information it holds needs to be updated by users as their circumstances change.

The 1997 Thorp Report noted that unless New Zealand could achieve a compliance rate of at least 90 percent then the benefits derived from registration would be significantly reduced.³⁵ International participation rates are notoriously difficult to estimate, but the following are indicative:

- In Canada estimates of the registration rate ranged from as low as 30 percent up to 90 percent.³⁶
- the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission 'conservatively estimated' in 2016 that there were more than 260,000 unregistered firearms in Australia,³⁷ which would indicate a registration rate not exceeding 91% (and likely to be lower).
- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates the global illicit market contains the equivalent of approximately 10 to 20 per cent of the number of firearms in the licit market.³⁸

International experience indicates that encouraging the participation of firearm users will require some mixture of the following:

1. As recommended by the Thorp Review, the government will need to bear the initial **set-up costs**. This is the typical model worldwide, albeit relevant authorities then take a different approach as to the extent to which some of these costs should be recovered through registration fees.

³³ Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, 'Illicit Firearms in Australia' (2016).

³⁴ Thorp Report, above n 2, 185.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ As reported in New Zealand Police, 'Inquiry into Issues Relating to the Illegal Possession of Firearms in New Zealand: Departmental Report for the Law and Order Committee' (2016).

³⁷ Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, above n 33.

³⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 'The Globalisation of Crime' (2011).

2. **Registration fees** should not be set too high so that they might be a barrier to registration.³⁹ A case could be made that the registration scheme will support a number of ‘public good’ functions (e.g. supporting police enforcement activities as they exercise search warrants) and therefore the registration fee should not be set on a cost-recovery basis.
3. **Sanctions** for not registering firearms will need to be enforced to ensure gun owners do not undermine the effectiveness of the registration system, particularly through wilful disobedience. For example, the Canadian registration scheme was constantly and publicly undermined by some gun owner groups.⁴⁰
4. **Targeted publicity** would be needed to ensure gun owners were aware of the need to register their firearms, with specific campaigns likely to be needed to target specific groups, such as ‘reluctant compliers’.
5. **Proactive outreach** by the registry to ensure address data in particular is accurate and updated when circumstances change. As noted in Annex One, the NSW firearms registry was criticised by the Auditor General for not proactively checking whether it still held accurate address data (7% of addresses the registry held for licensees were incorrect).
6. **Staff training:** it is essential that registry staff who are inputting data are technically proficient to ensure the features vital to identifying individual firearms are accurately recorded.

3.2 International approaches to registration schemes raise additional policy questions

International approaches to firearms registration vary considerably, not only in their day-to-day operation, but also in their scope of what is captured. The research for this paper has highlighted a number of issues that require further consideration in New Zealand:

1. whether the sale of ammunition should be linked to an owner’s registered firearms,
2. whether certain firearm parts need to be registered, and
3. whether antique firearms should be exempt from registration

Issue: Restricting ammunition sales to owners of registered firearms

If a firearm registration scheme is adopted in New Zealand, then an issue to be considered is whether individuals should only be able to purchase ammunition for the firearms that they have registered in their name. At present it is an offence to sell or supply ammunition to an unlicensed person, although there is no requirement that the purchaser own a weapon that can fire that particular type of ammunition.

Such a requirement would have the effect of strongly incentivising registration and would minimise the prospect of mass defiance of registration requirement, as was witnessed in Canada. Improved data on ammunition sales is also likely to give police important data for enforcement purposes.

In New South Wales, a licensed firearms dealer is prohibited from supplying ammunition unless purchaser has a firearm that takes that ammunition registered in their name (or a permit to acquire)

³⁹ For example, standalone registration fees in Australia range from \$10 (NSW) to \$18 (ACT). In some states, registration fees are incorporated into licensing fees (Western Australia), the cost for a permit to acquire a new firearm (Northern Territory), or are set by a firearms dealer who has responsibility for registering the firearm (Victoria).

⁴⁰ As a 2012 interview with the Executive Director of the Canadian Unlicensed Firearms Owners Association reported, ‘Due in part to weak incentives to register...millions of gun owners have simply chosen not to inform the government of their arsenals.’ Jeff Davis, ‘More guns in Canada now, but fewer owners: RCMP’ *National Post* (23 January 2012).

and the dealer has seen the current notice of registration.⁴¹ The Australian Federal Police Association is supportive of this limitation and recently called for this requirement should be incorporated into Federal Law.⁴²

In the United Kingdom prospective firearm owners need to be issued a certificate by the local police before they can purchase a weapon – this certificate not only lists the specific firearms that the holder can own, but also specifies the ammunition that the holder is authorised to purchase (including quantity limits).

Issue: Registration needs to encompass the major component parts of firearms

To prevent any mandatory registration being circumvented it is important that registration encompasses not just firearms, but also the essential components (frames and receivers) from which firearms can be constructed. Failing to require the registration of key parts would make it very easy for firearm owners to avoid registration by simply storing and buying/selling disassembled weapons. There would be a cost implication with this step, as it would effectively require every receiver/frame capable of disassembly to have a serial number or other permanent mark.

The NFA in Australia did not initially require the registration of firearm parts, but the state registration schemes have moved in this direction. For example, in 2001 New South Wales closed a loophole whereby handguns did not need to be registered if the barrel had been removed - stipulating that registration now 'applies to every firearm frame and firearm receiver in the same way as it applies to a firearm.'⁴³

At present there remains inconsistent treatment of the registration requirements for firearm parts across Australia.⁴⁴ The Australian Institute of Criminology has stated that the registration of major component firearm parts (frames and receivers) in all jurisdictions 'would enable police to more easily trace ownership history and the movement of firearms constructed illegally from firearm parts'.⁴⁵

Canada classifies receivers as a firearm (as an item 'that can be adapted for use as a firearm'⁴⁶) and requires them to be registered for restricted and prohibited firearms. The specific obligation applies to what is termed a 'receiver blank' – a receiver that has proceeded to the point where it is no longer useful for any purpose other than the receiver of a firearm.

Issue: There is a case for exempting antique firearms from registration

An international comparison highlights it is typical that owners of antique firearms are exempt from any obligation to register their firearms – on the basis that these firearms could not reasonably be said to pose a material public safety risk and it would therefore impose an unnecessary burden to require owners to register their weapons (i.e. particularly museum pieces and collectibles).

⁴¹ Firearms Act 1996 (NSW), section 65A.

⁴² Lachlan Roberts, 'Police union calls for national firearms registry to help reduce gun violence', *About Regional* (18 March 2019).

⁴³ Firearms Amendment (Trafficking) Act 2001 No. 24 (NSW).

⁴⁴ In addition to NSW, firearm parts (such as frames and receivers) are subject to registration in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and the Northern Territory – although what constitutes a firearm part varies between these jurisdictions.

⁴⁵ Bricknell, above n 32, 21.

⁴⁶ Section 2 of the Criminal Code. The definition also defines a firearm as a 'barrelled weapon...and includes and frame or receiver of such a barrelled weapon'

All the countries/states identified in this paper as having registration schemes exempt antique firearms, albeit the definition of an antique firearm varies considerably. For example:

- In Australia, the definition of an antique firearm varies across the country, but is typically designed to exclude from registration pre-1900 firearms that are incapable of firing a breach-loaded projectile. Pre-1900 revolvers are subject to registration.
- Canada's handgun registration exempts any firearm manufactured before 1898 that was not designed to discharge rim-fire or centre-fire ammunition (and has not been re-designed to do so), but also establishes the ability to define additional antique firearms through regulations – and has done so for 7 additional classes of firearms.
- The EU's Firearms Directive exempts antique firearms from its Firearms Directive (which places obligations on Member States to register firearms), but leaves it up to each Member State to use its own criteria. Definitions of what constitutes an antique firearm vary considerably across the EU, with definitions being varyingly tied to the year of production, model, rarity, the absence of commercially-available ammunition.⁴⁷
- The UK for example does not define what constitutes an antique firearm, leaving it to the courts to determine on a case-by-case basis whether a functioning firearm in the circumstances could be considered an antique and therefore exempt from registration and licensing. Regulatory guidance has been issued that most pre-1939 firearms would be considered antiques.⁴⁸

Interestingly, the UK National Ballistics Intelligence Service has highlighted that, with a narrowing of access to firearms, criminals are increasingly turning to antique firearms, including legally purchasing such weapons at antique fairs.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See European Commission, above n 7.

⁴⁸ Home Office, 'Guide on Firearms Licensing Law' (April 2016).

⁴⁹ European Commission, above n 7, 49.

Annex One: Country by country analysis

This annex examines a number of registration schemes that are in place around the world, their origin, the obligations the schemes create for buyers/sellers, and any issues that have arisen.

AUSTRALIA

Following the Port Arthur massacre the 1996 National Firearms Agreement (NFA) provided for the establishment of a nationwide firearms registration system. As firearms regulation is the responsibility of individual Australian states and territories, this national-level agreement was considered necessary to ensure a consistent and coherent approach to gun regulation. The Australasian Council of Police Ministers recommended that:

- i) New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania immediately establish an integrated licence and firearms registration system and that all other jurisdictions review their existing registration systems to ensure that all systems are compatible; and
- ii) that these databases be linked through the National Exchange of Police Information (NEPI) to ensure effective nationwide registration of all firearms.

This was given effect and Australian laws were amended to require state officials to maintain a register of the acquisition, possession and transfer of each privately held firearm.⁵⁰ The intent was that Police and law enforcement agencies would be able to access these nationally-linked databases, effectively creating a national registration scheme (this was called the National Firearm Licensing and Registration System or NFLRS). Some states do not explicitly state in legislation that the information captured by their registry should be shared at a national level,⁵¹ but in practice this information sharing is occurring.

By 2012 the Police and Australian state and federal governments had concluded the current registry system was no longer fit-for-purpose. There were 30 different databases dealing with various aspects of firearm regulation across the country⁵² and Police Ministers estimated that the registration system was 'losing track' of approximately 14,000 firearms each year.⁵³ The Australian 'grey market' for firearms (of which the police did not have visibility) comprised of handguns that remained unregistered since new gun laws came into force in 1996 and 'long arms' which were not registered because of state loopholes. In addition, the current system of state registrations was considered inadequate for capturing appropriate information regarding interstate gun transfers.

It was agreed by Ministers in 2012 that Australia should establish three new databases:

1. a new 'cradle-to-the-grave' national firearms registry (this has come to be known as the Australian Firearms Information Network (AFIN), but is referenced as the National Firearms Interface in regulations);
2. an Interpol-compliant National Firearms Identification Database - a reference tool to assist with the consistent identification and recording of firearms by defining the common attributes used to identify and characterise a firearm, such as make, model, calibre and capacity; and

⁵⁰ In ACT see Australian Capital Territory Firearms Act 1996, Part 11 (section 156). In NSW see Firearms Act 1996 No 46, section 33 (Part 3). In Tasmania see Firearms Act 1996, Part 4 (Section 83). In Victoria see Firearms Act 1996 No. 66 of 1996, Part 5 (section 113). In Queensland see Weapons Act 1990, section 49 (Part 3). In Northern Territory see Firearms Act 1997, section 7. In South Australia see Firearms Act 1977, section 6A (Part 2). In Western Australia see Firearms Regulations, section 21.

⁵¹ Queensland, Victoria or Western Australia.

⁵² Bricknell, above n 32.

⁵³ Fran Molloy 'New registry to keep track of "lost" guns' *The Sydney Morning Herald* (4 July 2012).

3. a national ballistic identification network capable of linking fired cartridge cases from a crime scene to the firearm used.

As yet, the AFIN database is not operational. In its latest 2017/18 Annual Report, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission noted that it had completed the development phase of the Firearms Information Network and is progressing work to integrate the network with states and territory systems.⁵⁴ Once all partners have connected then the current NFLRS system will be retired.

AFIN is designed to be 'a national shared firearms solution for law enforcement that provides a single, shared record for each firearm, firearm owner, and event in a firearm's existence in Australia'.⁵⁵ It is meant to improve on the earlier NFLRS by amalgamating all firearm records from police, immigration and border protection, to enable a single lifecycle view. It was intended to provide sophisticated searching and the matching of similar records, alerting police, immigration and border protection to information gaps or patterns.

Importantly though, it was still dependent on being populated by information submitted by states and territories. As the *Martin Place Siege Report* noted:⁵⁶

'the information in the new system will only be as good as the information already in the state databases.... State and Territory police agencies, that have not already done so, should as a matter of urgency, audit their firearms data and work to upgrade the consistency and accuracy of their own holdings before transferring it to the NFI.'

At a federal level, Australia appears to be grappling with many firearm registration issues that are unlikely to arise in a New Zealand context due to the shared state-Commonwealth responsibility for firearm regulation. In particular, considerable efforts have been made to address inconsistencies with how states/territories capture and update data, addressing gaps when guns move between states (and therefore regulators), and addressing the challenges of interoperability of these state/territory databases in a way that can provide a single point-of-access for the decentralised registration data.

The experiences of states/territories in developing and operating their firearm registration schemes are of more relevance to New Zealand. As outlined below, there have been some significant data integrity issues with all of the schemes (particularly relating to inconsistent, incomplete and out-of-date data, and firearm miscodes and misclassifications) that have been addressed to varying degrees.

Australian state-by-state analysis

As per the NFA (and given effect to by state laws), firearms sales in Australia can only be conducted by or through licensed firearms dealers. These dealers are required to record and maintain details (type, make, calibre and serial number) of each firearm purchased or sold against the identity (name, address and licence number) of the seller or the purchaser. The dealers are required to provide records to the State/Territory licensing authority.

⁵⁴ Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, above n 27.

⁵⁵ Australian Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 'Ability of Australian law enforcement authorities to eliminate gun-related violence in the community' (9 April 2015), ch 5.

⁵⁶ Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Martin Place Siege', Joint Commonwealth – New South Wales Review (January 2015), 49.

New South Wales

Firearms used by the general public are regulated through the Firearms Act 1996 and the Firearms Regulation 2017. The Act and Regulation reflect the National Firearms Agreement reached by all Australian jurisdictions in 1996 and confirmed in 2017.

The NSW Police, which includes the Firearms Registry, is responsible for administering the Act and Regulation, and for operating the NSW firearms licensing and registration scheme. Relevant third parties such as approved clubs, firearms dealers and shooting ranges also carry some administrative and oversight responsibilities under the Act and Regulation.

In February 2019 the New South Wales Auditor General concluded ‘there are gaps in how the Registry administers important requirements for existing licence holders which reduce the Registry’s ability to take an effective risk-based approach to regulating firearm ownership.’⁵⁷ Key findings with respect to the operation of the registration scheme are set out in the table below:

Key finding on the NSW registration scheme	Comment on nature of the issue
Address details in the register are not up-to-date (on average 7% of license renewal notices were returned due to the registry having incorrect addresses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Registry is not proactive in ensuring address details in the register are up to date• The Registry finds out about address changes from other sources, which it may receive well after the change has occurred. This includes when licence holders apply for a permit to acquire a firearm; when police attend events or conduct safe storage inspections; or when licence renewal notices are returned to the Registry due to incorrect addresses.
In addition to issues with address details not being up to date, the Registry's processes do not ensure all data is accurate when added to the register	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The register is based on outdated technology and is heavily reliant on manual data entry, which can be prone to errors.• There are some controls to ensure that data is accurate before being added to the register, but critical data is not validated. This includes address changes when licence holders update their details• The outdated technology also means that the Registry cannot tailor staff access to match their role• Prior to 2016 there was no national standard for firearm descriptions, which has led to identification errors
The Registry is responsive in updating data as it relates to potential criminal or antisocial behaviour, and for changes in firearm ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Registry ensures that it quickly updates the register when it receives information about potential criminal or antisocial activity of licence holders.• The Registry also promptly records changes of firearm ownership, with buyers, sellers and firearms dealers separately required to notify the Registry within seven days of sale transactions

The table below outlines some of the key aspects of the firearms registration scheme in New South Wales:

⁵⁷ New South Wales Auditor General, ‘Firearms Regulation’ (28 February 2019).

Key aspects of NSW registration scheme	
Eligibility requirements	18 years of age or over; have a genuine reason for possessing a firearm; hold a current firearms licence for the relevant class of firearm; submit a Permit to Acquire application form for the relevant firearm; pay any required fees.
Information to be supplied by owner	Current residential address and contact details; details of the premises where the firearm will be kept; the identifying number of any spare barrel that is capable of taking and discharging ammunition; particulars relating to the acquisition of the firearm.
Cost to register a firearm	\$10 (one-off); pensioners and primary producers exempt from fee.
Registry managed by:	NSW Police
Obligations on registrant to update address:	Registered owner must notify registry in writing of any change of address within 14 days
Penalty for non-registration	Person who supplies, acquires, or possesses an unregistered firearm is subject to up to 5 years imprisonment (or 14 years if it is a handgun) (s36(1) Firearms Act 1996)
Firearms exempt from registration	Antique firearms (pre 1900 and incapable of firing a breach-loaded projectile)
Obligations for subsequent sales	The registered owner must notify the registry within 7 days of a sale. With the exception of specific circumstances, a licensed Firearms Dealer is required to witness the transaction and return a 'Notice of Disposal' to the registry to finalise transfer of registration.

Queensland Firearms Registration

The Queensland Police Commissioner is required to maintain a register of all firearms in the state.⁵⁸ For each firearm, the register must capture the following minimum information:

- the name and address of the firearm's owner and details of the documents relied on to establish the owner's identity and address;
- the type, make, calibre, action, magazine capacity and any serial number of the firearm;
- details of the licence authorising possession of the firearm;
- for firearms acquired after the commencement of the Weapons Amendment Act 1996:
 - details of any permit to acquire authorising acquisition of the firearm; and
 - the name and address of the person from whom the firearm was acquired and the date it was acquired;
- the place where the firearm is generally kept;
- the reason given for possession of the firearm and, if appropriate, the reason why the particular firearm was needed.

The Queensland Weapons Licensing Branch has recently acknowledged the need to improve the operation of their licensing and registration scheme, which does not currently support online functionality, requires significant manual input by staff, and has involved employing additional

⁵⁸ Weapons Act 1990 (Qld), section 49.

temporary staff.⁵⁹ The Branch concluded they required a registry with online functionality, where a self-service portal (with online payment and secure digital identification) would be used to complement a trusted and extensive retail footprint. It was noted Australia Post currently provides similar services in Western Australia and that they are a likely partner to operate and deliver the retail-side the Queensland licensing and registration scheme. As yet no decisions have been made on the scope of any new database.

Key aspects of Queensland registration scheme	
Eligibility requirements	As per license, have right to own firearm
Information to be supplied by owner	As above
Cost to register a firearm	Unknown (QLD police: 'Registering new weapons to your licence will usually incur a one-off fee for each firearm')
Registry managed by:	Queensland Police
Obligations on registrant to update address:	Any change of address or circumstance must be reported to Police within 14 days of the change
Penalty for non-registration	If a licensee possesses an unregistered firearm, they are liable to a maximum penalty of 200 units (approximately \$15,000) (section 50A(1) Weapons Act 1990)
Firearms exempt from registration	An antique firearm manufactured before 1 January 1901 that is either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a muzzle loading firearm; - a cap and ball firearm; or - a firearm in which an Authorised Officer decides ammunition is not commercially available
Obligations for subsequent sales	Licensed firearms dealer is required to witness the transaction and return a 'Notice of Disposal' to the registry to finalise transfer of registration.

South Australia

Part 4 of the Firearms Act 2015 establishes a requirement to register firearms in South Australia. Once an application for a proposed transfer has been approved, the firearm must be transferred to the new owner in front of a prescribed person (e.g. licensed dealer) and the new owner then has 14 days to attend a police station with the firearm in order to register it.

Key aspects of South Australia registration scheme	
Eligibility requirements	The Registrar can refuse registration if they are not satisfied the proposed owner has a genuine reason to acquire the firearm, and a genuine need for the firearm which cannot be met by a firearm already in their possession.
Information to be supplied by owner	Purchaser of a firearm must supply their personal and contact details, the address where the firearm will be stored, a tally of the firearms they will own, details on their storage security, details on the firearm (serial number, make & model etc), the

⁵⁹ Initiative proposal (procurement exemption), signed by Assistant Commissioner Mike Condon (23 February 2018).

	intended purpose of use (with supporting documentation), and information on the person transferring possession.
Cost to register a firearm	\$37
Registry managed by:	South Australia Police
Obligations on registrant to update address:	There is a 14-day window to provide the Registrar with written notice of a change of name or address or any other detail recorded on the licence to avoid a fine
Penalty for non-registration	Owner of a firearm that is not registered in their name (as well as anyone in possession of an unregistered firearm) is subject to maximum penalties of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prescribed weapons: \$35,000 or 7 years - Category C, D, or H weapons: \$20,000 or 4 years - All other weapons: \$10,000 or 2 years (Firearms Act 2015, section 27)
Firearms exempt from registration	Antique firearms if manufactured prior to 1900, kept solely for curiosity, display, ornamental or investment purposes; are not used to fire projectiles, and subject to ammunition limitations (e.g. muzzle-loading)
Obligations for subsequent sales	Sale must be witnessed by prescribed person (e.g. dealer, police officer) who must witness the transfer and sign registration application form – which in turn must be submitted to police in-person within 14 days.

Western Australia

Western Australia has implemented a system different to other Australian jurisdictions (and one that predated the NFA), whereby the register records the details of firearm licences, permits and approvals, rather than registering individual firearms.⁶⁰ However, firearm licences in Western Australia are somewhat different than elsewhere as the licence records the types of firearms each licence holder is entitled to use – these are then recorded in the register. So, in effect, the register in Western Australia does capture details of all legally-held firearms in the state.

Western Australia Police (WAP) has contracted Australia Post to accept firearm licence applications. These applications are then transmitted to Police Licensing Services Firearms where they are processed.

In 2013 the Office of the Auditor General issued a scathing report on the registration scheme in Western Australia, concluding:⁶¹

‘The Firearms Register and supporting systems have numerous weaknesses in the controls over data input, processing and reporting. As a result, we have no confidence in the accuracy of basic information on the number of people licensed to possess firearms or the number of licensed or unlicensed firearms in Western Australia. In the absence of reliable information, WAP are unable to effectively manage firearms licensing and regulation in WA.’

The key findings from the review of the Firearms Registry Service (FRS) are set out below.

⁶⁰ Firearms Act 1973 (WA), sections 18 and 31.

⁶¹ Office of the Auditor General (WA), ‘Information Systems Audit Report’ Report 11 (June 2013), 12. This conclusion did not reflect an isolated view of the effectiveness of the registration scheme and followed reviews in 2000, 2004, and 2009.

Key finding on the WA registration scheme	Comment on nature of the issue
Firearms not recovered from deceased estates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FRS is only updated when a renewal notice is issued, not when firearm owners are deceased. During this time the firearms belonging to the deceased licence holder remain unaccounted
People assessed as unfit to have a firearm still listed as possessing them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> over 300 firearm licence holders still had firearms listed against their licence despite being classified by WAP as unfit to possess a firearm
Limited capacity for management reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FRS does not have the capability to produce simple management reports staff manually create spreadsheets to input data from FRS for management reporting
Errors in updating information on the national CRIMTRAC database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> over 25 000 instances were found where data could not be reconciled between the WAP firearms register and the national CRIMTRAC database these errors are mostly caused by data incompatibilities between the systems. This means the national database may not contain up-to-date or accurate records for WA firearms or licensees.
Workarounds and manual processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> manual processing is required for FRS to effectively operate, creating an increased risk of errors
Access and logging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> confidentiality of the data is at risk as there are no policies or procedures in place relating to log access, changes and reviews of logs for databases.
Australia Post contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Police were unable to provide the contract with Australia Post for firearms application processing, fee collection and letter printing

In 2016, Police introduced the Licensing and Registry information system to support its regulatory functions. The system records details of licence applications, licensed firearms and users, licence conditions, and firearm storage. It also guides staff through the key licence assessment processes, including final approval before a licence is issued

In 2019 an audit was undertaken into the broader licensing regime in Western Australia. This audit concluded:⁶²

‘Police’s key firearm licensing information system does not effectively support the entity to carry out its licensing and compliance activities. Basic licence and compliance information is unreliable and hard to get.’

A key issue was the lack of controls that were in place as to how data should be entered into the registry. The audit noted that the use of free text fields within the data management system (for firearm model and addresses) contributed to inaccurate, duplicate and incomplete information which may then compromise the registry’s integrity. Furthermore, the system still did not monitor who accessed the database and had a lack of reporting functionality.

⁶² Western Australian Auditor General’s Report, ‘Firearm Controls’ Report 18 (May 2019), 9.

It is relevant to note the Western Australian registration model was looked upon favourably by the Thorp Report in 1997, with the report observing:⁶³

‘The most attractive, and apparently the most successful, overseas firearm control system of those for which particulars are available to the Review, both in terms of its effect on levels of gun crime ... and its acceptance by gun users, is that used in Western Australia.’

The reports by the Auditor General in Western Australia would now call into question that assessment. While the Western Australian model may have some success in ensuring some visibility of the firearms individuals may have access to (and are able to use), the significant data integrity issues with the database appear to be calling into question its effectiveness.

Key aspects of Western Australia registration scheme	
Eligibility requirements	A licence, approval or permit cannot be granted unless the applicant has shown they have a ‘genuine reason’ for acquiring or possessing the firearm. Commissioner must be satisfied not only as to the genuine reason, but that the particular kind of firearm can be reasonably justified.
Information to be supplied by owner	Applicants must provide proof of their genuine reason for a firearm (e.g. member of a shooting club, has invitation to hunt on private land).
Cost to register a firearm	None. Information captured through license (\$263 for first year, \$55 annually thereafter)
Registry managed by:	Western Australia Police (application process carried out by Australia Post)
Obligations on registrant to update address:	Police must be notified within 21 days of any change of address.
Penalty for non-registration	No requirement for registration. But a person commits a crime if they sell, purchase or come into possession of a firearm and do not hold a licence/permit entitling them to do so. Penalty is up to 5 years imprisonment and more if there are additional factors (e.g. handgun, drugs).
Firearms exempt from registration	None
Obligations for subsequent sales	Previous owner must notify police of the disposal of their firearm, including the details of the person it was sold to. A buyer of a firearm must hold a licence or permit for the firearm they are purchasing.

Tasmania

Under the Firearms Act 1996 (Tasmania) the Commissioner of Tasmania Police is required to maintain a register of all firearms. This register must contain particulars of the firearm and its owner, and must be linked to the national database administered by the Australian Crime Commission to enable approved authorities to access it.

In 2013 Tasmania Police put in place their new Firearms and Weapons Data System. This new database marked a shift to electronic processing of licenses and registrations, and tracking storage inspections and firearm relocations.

⁶³ Thorp Report, above n 2, 183.

Key aspects of Tasmania registration scheme	
Eligibility requirements	As per license, have right to own firearm
Information to be supplied by owner	Permit to acquire must state why firearm is needed and why firearms already owned are not suitable. Registration requires supplying personal and contact details, photographic firearms licence, and detail on the firearm (e.g. make, model, capacity, calibre, serial number, previous owner).
Cost to register a firearm	\$20.54; \$9.48 for each additional firearm
Registry managed by:	Tasmania Police
Obligations on registrant to update address:	Must notify police in writing
Penalty for non-registration	A person must not sell, acquire, possess or use a firearm that is not registered, subject to a maximum penalty of 50 penalty units (approximately \$8,000) and/or 2 years imprisonment (Firearms Act 1996 section 74(1))
Firearms exempt from registration	Firearms manufactured before 1 January 1900 that were not designed to discharge cartridge ammunition or for which cartridge ammunition is not commercially available. Imitation firearms (still require a licence).
Obligations for subsequent sales	A registrant must notify the Commissioner with particulars within 7 days after selling their firearm.

Victoria

Under Part 5 of the Firearms Act 1996 (Victoria), the Commissioner of Police must record the following information in a firearm register (to the extent they are known):

- the make, type, calibre, action, serial number and, where known or available, model of the firearm; and
- the name of the person who possesses the firearm; and
- particulars of the licence under which the firearm is possessed; and
- the address at which the firearm is ordinarily stored; and
- any other prescribed information.

Key aspects of Victoria registration scheme	
Eligibility requirements	As per license, have right to own firearm
Information to be supplied by owner	As above: detail on firearm, personal details, licence conditions, and address where firearm is ordinarily stored
Cost to register a firearm	No cost. However, the dealer will charge individual a small fee for transferring ownership of the firearm (dealer has to register transfer).
Registry managed by:	Victoria Police
Obligations on registrant to update address:	It is a condition of a firearms licence and permit that the licensee will notify the Police in writing within 14 days of the change of address.
Penalty for non-registration	A person must not possess, carry, or use an unregistered firearm, subject to the following penalties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - long-gun: from 120 penalty units (approx. \$19,000) / 2 years up to 1,200 units (approx. \$190,000) / 10 years, depending on type of weapon and previous history of offending

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - handgun: from 600 penalty units (approx. \$93,000) / 7 years up to 2100 penalty units (approx. 326,000) / 17 years (Firearms Act 1996, sections 6A and 7B)
Firearms exempt from registration	<p>A firearm is exempt from regulation if it was manufactured before 1900 and meets the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - handguns – a) its method of ignition pre-dates the development of ‘percussion’* or b) is a single shot antique handgun - long-guns – a) it does not take cartridge ammunition or b) if it does take cartridge ammunition, that ammunition is not commercially available. <p>Imitation weapons</p>
Obligations for subsequent sales	Following approval of Permit to Acquire, individual can acquire firearm. The dealer has 28 days to notify the Police that the firearm has been transferred.

ACT

As with Tasmania, legislation in ACT requires that the register for firearms stored in the ACT must be linked to a national scheme for firearm management. The obligation to establish and maintain a register in the ACT falls on the ‘Registrar of Firearms’, a police officer.

Unlike other states, primary legislation in ACT requires a mandatory review of the accuracy of the information in the firearms register.⁶⁴ The registrar is required to review a sample of firearm registry entries and submit a written report on the results of the review to the Director General.

Key aspects of ACT registration scheme	
Eligibility requirements	Eligible to register firearm if individual has an appropriate license. The registration remains in force unless cancelled.
Information to be supplied by owner	Each firearm needs to have the following information recorded about it: personal and contact details of the owner, particulars of the grant of the licence, identifying features of the firearm (including any spare barrel), date of acquisition and details of previous owner, whether the owner is a member of a gun club (including details), date and details of any disposal, details of any approved modifications.
Cost to register a firearm	\$18 per firearm (\$18 also required for the necessary ‘permit to acquire’)
Registry managed by:	ACT Police
Obligations on registrant to update address:	A licensee or the holder of a permit must notify the registrar of any change of address within seven calendar days.
Penalty for non-registration	<p>A person may not dispose of, or acquire, or possess, or use an unregistered firearm, subject to maximum penalties of up to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - prohibited firearms: 1,000 penalty units (approx. \$150,000) or 10 years - all other firearms: 500 penalty units (approx. \$75,000) 5 years

⁶⁴ Firearms Act 1996 (ACT), section 159.

	Firearms Act 1996, section 177
Firearms exempt from registration	Antique firearms
Obligations for subsequent sales	Both buyer and seller commit an offence if they fail to supply the Registrar with required information within 7 days of a sale

Northern Territory

Under Part 5 of the Firearms Act 1997 (NT), the Commissioner of Police is required to register the particulars of firearms and their owners in the Northern Territory. This register must be capable of being linked to the NEPI system and be accessed by other authorities.

Applications to acquire a firearm (and for a license) must be made in hard-copy to the Police. The individual concerned also has to present their firearm for inspection to confirm the firearm description and serial numbers before the firearms will be registered.

Key aspects of Northern Territory registration scheme	
Eligibility requirements	Eligible to register firearm if individual has an appropriate license.
Information to be supplied by owner	Personal and contact details, information pertaining to firearm (serial number, action type, model, category, calibre, capacity, make/brand), name and license details of previous owner
Cost to register a firearm	\$70 (includes cost for permit to acquire)
Registry managed by:	Northern Territory Police Force
Obligations on registrant to update address:	Registered owners have 14 days to notify the Police of any changes in their particulars.
Penalty for non-registration	A person, must not sell, purchase, possess or use a firearm that is not registered, subject to the following maximum penalties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - category A firearm: 50 penalty units (approx. \$8,000) or 12 months imprisonment - category B firearm: 10 penalty units (approx. \$1,600) or 3 months imprisonment Firearms Act 1997 section 59
Firearms exempt from registration	Antique firearms

CANADA

From 1995 to 2012 there was a requirement in Canada for all non-restricted (long-guns, or rifles/shotguns), restricted (handguns)⁶⁵ and prohibited⁶⁶ firearms to be registered. In 2012 the requirement to register long-guns was abolished by a new Conservative government, which also mandated the permanent destruction of all relevant files.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Restricted firearms include those handguns that are not prohibited, certain semi-automatic weapons, certain small firearms and specified weapons (e.g. M16).

⁶⁶ Prohibited firearms include fully automatic weapons, specified military firearms, sawn-off firearms, and certain small handguns.

⁶⁷ Note, Quebec established its own requirement to register long-guns following the abolishment of the Federal Register.

The main reason given for abolishing the long-gun registration requirement was that it was not cost-effective: the registry was operated at an exorbitant cost and imposed an unreasonable burden on law-abiding firearm owners to register firearms that had only a minor role in the nation's crime statistics.

Undoubtedly the substantial cost-overruns in establishing the registry were instrumental in declining public and political support for continued universal registration. In 2002 the Auditor General strongly criticised the Government when it emerged the cost of the Canadian Firearms Program (which introduced new licensing and registration requirements) would cost taxpayers more than 500 times its original estimate over the first 10 years, up from \$2m to over \$1b.⁶⁸ The \$1b price tag was erroneously reported in the media as applying solely to the cost of firearm registration, rather than the cost of implementing all new firearm laws. It was not until 2009 that the direct annual cost of the registry was identified – with an estimate that the operating costs of the registry in 2008/09 were between \$1.195m and \$4.03m.⁶⁹

The decision to abolish the long-gun registry was made despite a formal evaluation concluding that the costs were reasonable and 'overall, the [Canadian Firearms Program] is operating in a cost effective and efficient manner'.⁷⁰ Significantly, the evaluation also concluded:⁷¹

'Canadians are receiving value for their tax dollars from the CFP. Overall, the Canadian Firearms Program is cost-effective in reducing firearms-related crime and promoting public safety through universal licensing of firearms owners and registration of firearms in Canada.'

The evaluation also concluded that:⁷²

'Firearms registration is a critical component of the entire firearms program. The program, as a whole, is an important tool for law enforcement. It also serves to increase the accountability of firearms owners for their firearms, by linking registered firearms to licensees. An acceptable level of compliance toward long gun registration is essential for improving the Registry's utility as a tool to promote public safety.'

Furthermore, once the Canadian experience with firearm registration is analysed it becomes clear that it is highly unlikely that such an issue with contentious cost overruns could take place in New Zealand. In particular:

- A new entity (The Canadian Firearms Centre) was established in 1996 to administer the Firearms Act, including licensing owners and registering firearms. Setting up a new entity was a key component of the escalating costs, as the new organisation did not yet have the governance, frameworks and contracting disciplines in place to efficiently deliver and operate a large IT project. Responsibility for registration shifted to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 2006, which was credited with reducing operational costs.⁷³

⁶⁸ See CBC News 'Auditor General Takes Aim at Gun Registry's \$1 Billion Price Tag' (4 December 2002). The initial \$2m figure was the expected net cost after an expected \$117m in registration fees had been collected.

⁶⁹ See Royal Canadian Mounted Police, above n 6, 57-58. This annual cost presumably covers relatively small IT investment given the registry had been operating for 13 years by then.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 53.

⁷¹ Ibid, 59.

⁷² Ibid, 44.

⁷³ Ibid, 54.

- Several Canadian provinces exercised their choice to opt-out of administering the Firearms Act, which led to a mixture of Federal and Provincial responsibilities for administering and enforcing firearm registration, and an inevitable increase in operational costs.
- The Auditor General concluded in 2006 that one third of the total registry costs could be attributed to dealing with project delays.⁷⁴ In particular, the Auditor General criticised a decision on IT development beginning before legislation and regulations had been finalised, which was responsible for driving costs.
- Initial records were paper-based, leading to increased administrative costs and data-integrity issues (which drive costs).
- The Interior Minister and Prime Minister also blamed mass non-compliance by groups of gun owners for the increasing costs.⁷⁵ Not only were resources expended in trying to reach out to these groups, but registration rebates were offered to entice registration from uncooperative firearm owners.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

In 2008 The EU amended its Firearms Directive⁷⁶ requiring Member States to enact legislation that would require marking and registration of any firearm or essential part placed on the market and to establish national computerised data-filing system concerning registration by 2015.

Each Member State has considerable leeway in how they meet the requirements of the Directive and there have been varying approaches taken to adopting registration schemes.

An evaluation of the EU Directive concluded that the direct costs associated with the 'marking and traceability' element of the EU Directive (requiring registration and establishment of a computerised filing system for firearms) were reasonable in light of the benefits that were generated.⁷⁷

The introduction of firearm registration in the European Union has also been credited with making it more difficult for criminals to access and traffic firearms. A comprehensive evaluation in 2014 of the EU's Firearms Directive, which, amongst other aspects, required member states to register firearms and create a database for accessing this information (more information in Annex One) concluded:⁷⁸

'the level of security and protection against criminal acts and illicit trafficking has been improved mainly through the introduction of additional tracing requirements for [Member States'] competent authorities (i.e., establishment of the computerised data filing system in which all firearms subject to the Directive shall be recorded) and for dealers (i.e., the maintenance of a register of all firearms transactions).'

Other points of interest from the EU evaluation include:

- Firearms traceability has been weakened by the limited integration of two systems envisaged by the Directive: a centralised register of legitimate firearms owners, and a register of dealers'

⁷⁴ Office of the Auditor General, '2006 May Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada' Chapter 4: Firearms Program (May 2006), 97.

⁷⁵ Shawn McCarthy, 'Firearms Registry Costing "Flawed", Report Says' *The Globe and Mail* (4 February 2003)

⁷⁶ Directive 2008/51/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 amending Council Directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons.

⁷⁷ European Commission, above n 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 81.

transactions. Only the UK, Portugal and Slovenia were singled out as making efforts to digitalise dealers' registers in order to integrate those records with specific firearms.

- Issues with decentralised data capture and a lack of data controls can create national-level issues, with poor record-keeping and differences in classifications often making it impossible to be sure of the total number of firearms. The example of Germany was given where 550 local authorities have the ability to feed information into the registry.

The **United Kingdom** is credited with having some of the most stringent gun control laws in the world.⁷⁹ The Firearms Act 1968 makes it unlawful to possess, purchase, or acquire a firearm, shotgun (which has a separate definition from firearm), or ammunition without a certificate. Individuals who wish to obtain a certificate to possess a firearm or shotgun must apply to the chief officer of the police in the area in which they reside and show that they have a 'good reason' to possess each weapon.

The UK's firearm certificate effectively operates as a mandatory registration scheme. Each certificate details the type and number of weapons that it covers, including identification numbers and quantities of ammunition the holder may purchase or acquire and possess at one time. Once granted, a firearm certificate is typically valid for a five-year period and the owner must then reapply to the police for authorisation to own their weapon.

THE UNITED STATES

There is no comprehensive national system of firearm registration in the United States. In fact, federal law prohibits the use of the National Instant Criminal Background Check System to create any system of registration of firearms or firearm owners.⁸⁰

At a state level:

- Only Hawaii and the District of Columbia require the registration of all firearms,
- California requires all gun transfers to be processed through a licensed dealer and requires a state law enforcement agency to maintain records of these transfers in a central database, which effectively acts as universal firearm registration (with minimal obligations on the firearm owner),
- New York requires the registration of handguns and assault weapons,
- States requiring the registration of (mostly pre-ban) assault weapons include California, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey and New York.

Hawaii requires registration of all firearms with the county police chief within five days of acquisition. The registration must include: (1) the name of the manufacturer and importer; (2) the model, type of action, calibre or gauge, and serial number of the firearm; and (3) the source from which the firearm was obtained, including the name and address of the previous registrant. In addition, every person who brings a firearm into Hawaii must register the firearm within three days of the arrival of either the person or the firearm, whichever arrives later. Hawaii does not require renewal of the registration.

The **District of Columbia** requires (in addition to identifying information about the applicant and firearm) detailed information concerning: 1) whether the applicant has ever been denied any firearm-related licence, permit or registration certificate and, if so, the reasons for such denial; 2) the

⁷⁹ Library of Congress, 'Firearms-Control Legislation and Policy: Great Britain' (February 2013).

⁸⁰ Owners of machine guns (before they were banned), and certain short-barrelled rifles and shotguns are subject to a requirement to register their firearm with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

applicant's role in any mishap involving a firearm; 3) if the applicant has applied for other registration certificates; and 4) where the firearm generally will be kept.

Registered owners in the District are required to notify the Chief of Police of the loss, theft, or destruction of the registration certificate or of a registered firearm. Registrants must also notify the Chief of the sale, transfer, or other disposition of the firearm within two business days of such sale, transfer or disposition, and must return the registration certificate for any firearm that has been lost, stolen, destroyed, or otherwise disposed of or transferred.

Annex Two: NZ's Experience with a Firearms Registration Scheme

As outlined in the Thorp report, New Zealand has previously had a piecemeal system of registration under the Arms Act 1920. The Act set in place the system of permits to procure rifles, shotguns, pistols and unlawful weapons, and the obligation to register individual weapons. With some variations, this was to be the basis of arms control for the next 60 years (from 1930 to 1968 the obligation to register shotguns was removed, but reintroduced from 1968 with a single permit able to cover multiple firearms).

From the 1960s, the Police began to make greater use of the 'arms register'. This consisted of the shotgun permits index in Wellington and 16 separate indices throughout the country containing paper copies of the registration of rifles, pistols and restricted weapons.

A police study undertaken in the 1960s/70s concluded that 66 percent of the entries were inaccurate in some respect, and that a large number of rifles which had been registered could not be located. A failure to notify changes of address as required by law was the most common cause of inaccuracy.

The Thorp Review concluded that:⁸¹

'Such a decentralised system required considerable manual investigation to pinpoint a firearm's owner or location and was of limited effect in locating armed offenders. Moreover, the "register" was both incomplete and inaccurate, a major cause of inaccuracy being the slight attention paid by shooters to notifying their changes of address.'

The Thorp Report notes the evolving purpose of registration in New Zealand. Initially the registration of firearms was required from the 1920s, not to address crime, but to manage the risk of riot and revolution (hence the rationale for the controls on rifles, shotguns and explosives). By the 1970s, policy efforts to develop an improved registration system were based on the premise 'that a closer control of users was desirable to try to reduce access to firearms by unsuitable persons'.⁸²

In 1983 New Zealand reversed its approach to firearm control. The Arms Act 1983 saw the introduction of a system of licensing the firearm owner instead of the previous emphasis on the registration of individual firearms. It could be said that this approach was favoured in large part because it would allow recreational shooters to pursue their lawful activities without undue restrictions. Licensed gun owners would be able to sell amongst themselves, with no need to go through a centralised permit and registration system.

This approach was informed by a Police conclusion that, although the registration of firearms would provide police with an invaluable investigative aid, there was no relationship between the registration of firearms and their control and there was no reason to believe a registration scheme could be effectively updated. Under the new regime, pistols and other restricted weapons were to remain registered.

⁸¹ Thorp Report, above n 2, 13.

⁸² Thorp Report, above n 2, 14.

Annex Three: Impact of Australian Gun-Control Initiatives

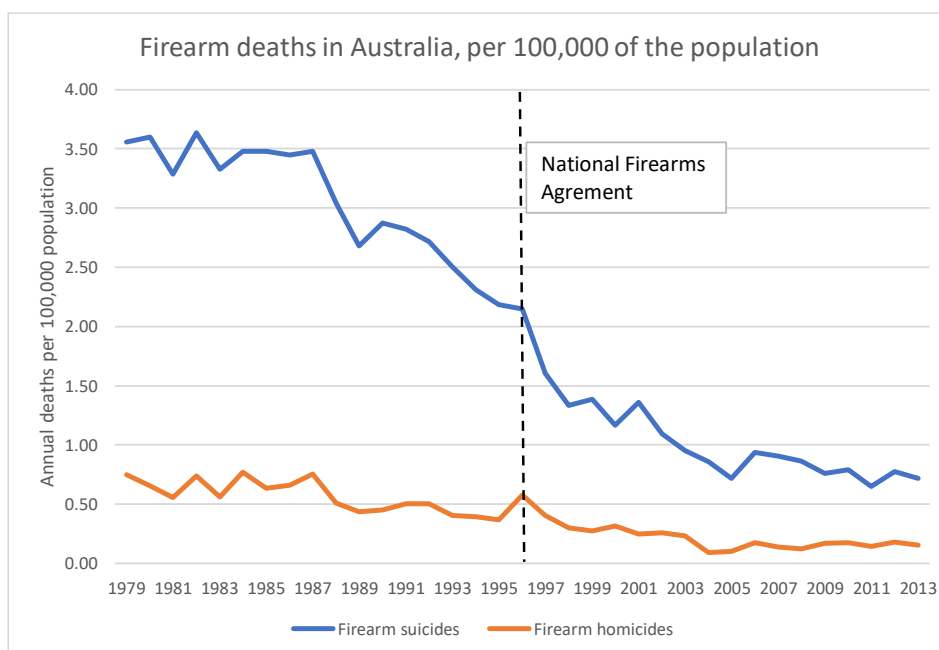
Following the Port Arthur massacre the 1996 National Firearms Agreement (NFA) provided for the establishment of a nationwide firearms registration system in Australia, in conjunction with a broader tightening of access to firearms, the banning of semi-automatic rifles and pump-action shotguns, and a buy-back scheme. These policies have been credited with removing between 700,000 – 1,000,000 weapons from Australia (approximately 20 percent of firearms). A detailed description of the key aspects of Australian registration schemes is outlined in Annex One.

The rate of firearm deaths in Australia (particularly for suicides) has declined markedly since the 1970s. This decline began prior to the NFA, but there was a more rapid decline in the rate of firearm deaths from 1997. Comparing firearm deaths per 100,000 population from 1990-1995 with 2008-2013 shows:

- suicide by firearm fell from a median of 2.5/100,000 population to 0.76, and
- homicide by firearm fell from a median of 0.4/100,000 population to 0.17.

Figure 1 below shows that Australians are now much less likely to die as a result of firearms and that the tightening of gun regulations in 1996 appears to have played a key role in this.

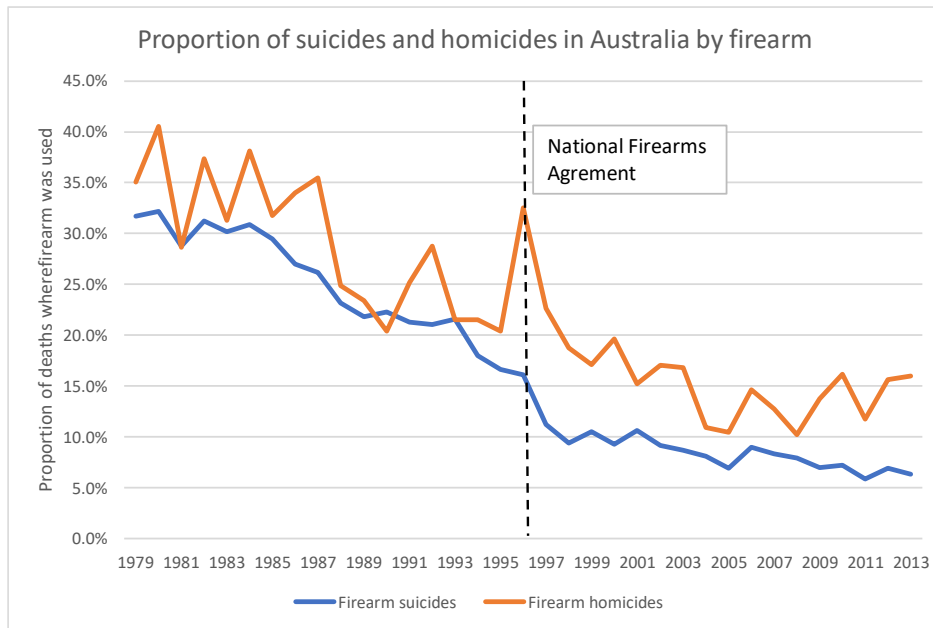
Figure 1 - The rate of firearm deaths in Australia, 1979-2013⁸³



While Figure 1 above shows that while the rate of firearm deaths has fallen in Australia, it doesn't show that non-firearm suicide and homicide rates have also fallen – which may lead some to claim that the more infrequent use of firearms for suicides/homicides simply mirrors the falling national rates in Australia for suicide and homicide. However, Figure 2 below shows that, although the rates of homicide and suicide may be continuing to decline in Australia, the use of firearms in those deaths is also decreasing.

⁸³ Underlying figures provided in Chapman, Alpers and Jones, 'Association Between Gun Law Reforms and Intentional Firearm Deaths in Australia, 1979-2013' (19 July 2016), sourced from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Injury Surveillance Unit.

Figure 2 - Proportion of suicides and homicides that were committed by firearm in Australia, 1979-2013⁸⁴



Comparing the role that firearms play in suicides and homicides from the period 1990-1995 with 2008-2013 shows:

- the proportion of suicides committed by firearm fell from an annual median of 21% to 7%, and
- the proportion of homicides committed by firearm fell from an annual median of 22% to 16%
- Most, commonly the Australian experience with firearm regulation is cited for its impact on mass shootings – with this most commonly being attributed to the ban on semi-assault rifles. While there had been 13 mass shootings (using the definition of five or more victims killed by gunshot, not including the perpetrator) in the 18 years before the law changes, there were none in the 22 years following (until 2018).

There is a significant body of literature assessing the impact of the tightening of firearms regulation in Australia, including:

- A 2011 Harvard Injury Control Research Centre summary of research noted a number of studies suggested beneficial effects from the law changes, including a reduction in mass shootings and a reduction in the rate of firearm-related deaths (homicides and suicides).⁸⁵
- Quantitative analysis in 2018 concluded there was strong evidence there was a structural change in 1996 (the year of the NFA), that led to the absence of mass killings in Australia in the following years.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Harvard Injury Control Research Centre, 'The Australian Gun Buyback', Spring 2011 (issue 4).

⁸⁶ Chapman, Stewart, Alpers, Jones, 'Fatal Firearm Incidents Before and After Australia's 1996 National Firearms Agreement Banning Semiautomatic Rifles' *Annals of Internal Medicine* (3 July 2018).

- With respect to homicide rates, a study using Victoria as a control group (given that this state had previously enacted firearm restrictions in 1988), found a 14% reduction in overall firearm death rates in states implementing NFA restrictions relative to Victoria.⁸⁷
- In possibly the most complete study on the relationship between firearms related deaths and the NFA, a 2010 study concluded the NFA changes reduced the firearm suicide rate by close to 80%, with evidence suggesting the firearm homicide rate also dropped by a significant portion.⁸⁸ The authors note that while focusing on the buyback, it was only one element of the NFA, and the results need to be attributed to the broader NFA, including universal registration.

⁸⁷ Ozanne-Smith, Ashby, Newstead et al. 'Firearm related deaths: the impact of regulatory reform' *Injury Prevention* (2004); 10(5):280–286.

⁸⁸ Leigh and Neill 'Do Gun Buybacks Save Lives? Evidence from Panel Data' *Institute for the Study of Labor*, (June 2010).