

THE TRUTH ABOUT AUSTRALIA

The National Rifle Association likes to tell tall tales about Australia. The best one is that gun control Down Under is a failure.

April 28th, 1996 was the date of the Port Arthur Massacre, Australia's most devastating gun tragedy, in which a disturbed man went on a killing spree that left 35 dead and 19 injured. The massacre catalyzed a demand for comprehensive gun control. By 1997, Australia's States and Territories had passed the most significant gun law reforms in their history, including a ban on semi-automatic rifles and pump-action shotguns; registration of all firearms and licensing of all shooters; and safe storage requirements for guns and ammunition.[1]

To persuade gun-owners to turn in their semi-automatic long guns, the Australian government established a buyback program, funded by the Federal Government and administered by the States and Territories. Reimbursements were generous; the program eventually cost over \$320 million Australian dollars and resulted in over 643,000 guns being turned in.[2] Per capita, **the Australian buyback was massive, equivalent to an estimated 40 million guns in the US.**[3]

Has anything changed in Australia since the new laws went into effect? **Homicides committed with firearms have been declining** – from 21 percent of all homicides in 1997 to 16 percent in 2002-2003.[4, 5]

Along with the declining use of firearms in homicide, **Australia saw a 44% decline in the use of firearms in armed robberies from 1993 to 2003.**[6] From 1997 to 2003, the proportion of robberies committed with a firearm dropped from 10 to 6 percent.[7, 8]

Suicide rates using a firearm dropped 48% between 1991 and 2001 and firearm-related accidental injuries in Australia are also declining.[9] Public health experts see these declines as related to tighter controls over who may obtain a gun, stricter requirements for training and safe storage, and longer waiting periods for obtaining gun licenses.[10]

The next time a credulous friend tells you that Australia actually experienced more crime when it got tougher on crime, offer your friend a *Fosters* and a helping of truth.

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Endnotes:

1. Simon Chapman, *Over Our Dead Bodies: Port Arthur and Australia's Fight for Gun Control*. Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1998, 72.
2. *Ibid*, 82.
3. Peter Reuter and Jenny Mouzos, in "Australia: A Massive Buyback of Low-Risk Guns," in Jens Ludwig and P.J. Cook (eds.), *Evaluating Gun Policy: Effects on Crime and Violence*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2003, 130.
4. Australian Institute of Criminology, "Facts and Figures: 1998," Australian Government. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/facts/1998/facts.pdf>
5. Australian Institute of Criminology, "Facts and Figures: 2004," Australian Government. http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/facts/2004/facts_and_figures_2004.pdf
6. *Ibid*.

7. Australian Institute of Criminology, "Facts and Figures: 1998."
8. Australian Institute of Criminology, "Facts and Figures: 2004."
9. Jenny Mouzos and Catherine Rushfort, "Firearms related deaths in Australia, 1991-2001," Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Government.
<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi269t.html>
10. Dr. Adam Graycar, Director, Australian Institute of Criminology, "Crime, Safety and Firearms," Speech to *Injury 2000: Prevention and Management*, Canberra, Nov. 23, 2000.
http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/other/graycar_adam/2000-11-csf.pdf