



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

22 DECEMBER 1987

I am pleased to announce that this afternoon the Commonwealth, the States and the Northern Territory have agreed to take major initiatives in the area of gun control.

This meeting presented us with the opportunity to exercise leadership on a matter of increasing, and justified, public concern.

The Governments represented at today's meeting agreed that the cost we as a society are paying for guns is unacceptably high.

We agreed we have the obligation to take what steps we can to minimise the risk to the Australian public, and to ensure our public places and our homes remain as free as possible from the prospect of injury or death by guns.

Gun related violence is now a daily feature of our lives.

If guns were not readily available, many crimes which today result in bloodshed or the threat of bloodshed would be much less serious and dangerous incidents.

The meeting noted the advances which have been made in the Police Ministers' Council towards achieving uniformity. With the exception of Tasmania, the meeting has asked the Council to address as a matter of urgency and report back to a Premiers' Conference on the following issues:

- . A ban on all automatic and semi-automatic firearms
- . Strict licensing of each person to possess a firearm
- . Requirement to obtain a permit to purchase each firearm
- . Registration of all firearms
- . Restrictions on the sale of ammunition
- . Restrictions on the availability of manuals relating to the construction of weapons

We have also:

- . Asked the Council to look at the questions of possible compensation and amnesty for the surrender of firearms

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- . Asked the Attorneys-General to examine the issue of specific extra penalties for the use of firearms in criminal offences

The Commonwealth Government in consultation with the States and the Northern Territory through the Standing Committee of Commonwealth and State Attorneys-General, will urgently examine the question of violent films and videos with a view to reinforcing the banning of depictions of violence, cruelty and sexual violence. Included in this examination will be the question of assisting parents by making clear, by adequate labelling, the violent content of videos, and the question of establishing uniform national standards on video classifications and availability.

The meeting also has asked the Censorship Board and the Films Board of Review to urgently implement stringent application of current guidelines where overt violence is portrayed.

The meeting expressed concern at the continuous, graphic display of violence through the visual media.

In addition the Commonwealth is taking the following steps to facilitate gun control:

- . Amending customs regulations to ban the importing of all automatic and semi-automatic rifles
- . Banning sales of semi-automatic rifles from the Lithgow arms factory to members of the public
- . Placing strict controls on the disposal of surplus army weapons
- . Taking steps to ensure that rifle clubs comply with State and Northern Territory legislation

The Police Ministers will also be examining the question of "mail order" firearms with a view to placing restrictions on the purchasing of weapons at a distance.

Whilst availability of firearms is an important element in community violence, clearly it is the actions of people that cause the violence:

- . The meeting recognised the need to stringently limit the access to weapons by people who may have a tendency to violence.

In taking these steps, we fully recognise that the reasons for violence in our society are deep and complex. To assist in the understanding and combatting of such violence, we have authorised the setting up of a National Committee on Violence to look at related psychological and social questions. The Committee will have a broad membership and costs will be born by each of the participating governments.

Notwithstanding today's agreement, the Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria feel that the proposals do not go far enough.

The proposals do not recognise that the need to ensure the safety and effective protection of the community from firearms misuse is paramount. It supersedes the rights and interests of gun owners.

Mr Cain and Mr Unsworth called for the introduction of uniform legislation across the States and Territories which prohibits the private ownership of guns except under narrowly defined occupational and sporting exceptions.

The measures announced today represent a new co-operative approach between the Commonwealth, the States and the Northern Territory in the area of gun control.

It is our hope and belief that as a result of these steps lives will be saved and that the level of fear in our community will be reduced.

I thank the Premiers, their representatives and the Chief Minister for their attendance at these discussions at short notice and for their co-operative approach which has enabled us to reach agreement this afternoon.