

Written evidence submitted by Dr James R. Pritchett (OWB121)

Summary of Points:

1. Clarification of 'defence'
2. The status of antiques
3. Matters of age verification
4. Clarification on postage
5. The issue of .50 calibre sporting rifle
6. The language of the bill concerning .50 rifles
7. The .50 rifle's actual capacity for harm.
8. The MARS action
9. The MARS action and disabled shooters
10. The problem of wording 'rapid fire.'
11. The lack of heed given to respondents in consultation.

I am an academic specialising in the study of military history, security affairs and the nature and logic of violence. I am a collector of antique ethnographic weaponry, a sportsman, a craftsman, fencer and martial artist. Naturally I therefore have a personal as well as intellectual interest in further legislation concerning the purchase and ownership of any item which may be considered a weapon.

Undoubtedly you are aware that there is notable objection to various elements of the new Offensive Weapons Bill in the tens of thousands, if not more, from across various interested groups. I am pleased to note the Bill has evolved somewhat to include 'defences' for posting custom-made items, fencing and re-enactment equipment and blunt blades. I am further pleased to have seen some rational defence of sportsmen and women and their interests by certain MPs in the live debates in the Commons.

However I would raise to you a number of points which I believe must be addressed by the Committee.

1. It is of concern that the Home Office seems to have confused 'defence' with 'exemption'. In UK law these are not synonymous. 'Defence' considers a person guilty until proven innocent and vice versa with an exemption. The Home Office and/or your committee must clarify this to avoid issues down the line for citizens and the courts.
2. Antiques and their postage to private addresses should be listed in the 'defences' part of the Bill. We have a large and famous antiques industry, including in historical arms and armour, which this Bill poses a deeply misguided threat to, along with undermining their cultural and historical role. To say nothing of the individual trader at the personal level. I think of my acquaintance Doctor Richmond Dutton, a purveyor of rare ethnographic weaponry whom I have had the fortune to order several items from in the past. For dealers such as he, such rashly orchestrated legislation poses a threat to livelihood. It is incomprehensible that in the day of internet shopping and delivery services that the Home Office is aiming to prevent the delivery of antiques which, the evidence shows, are rarely if ever used criminally. Such items vitally require the same 'defences' as sporting and re-enactment items described in the Bill,

though really a clear exemption should be granted all such items. As I'm sure you are aware such artefacts are exempted from the OWA and Amendments, as well as the more recent, poorly-designed 'samurai sword' ban. As such, it is peculiar that antiques are not mentioned after being exempt in prior legislation.

3. There is little thought given to the issue of age verification. The Royal Mail and Parcelforce do not require proof of age, so how will age verification be achieved as the Bill describes?
4. There is required in the Bill, further clarification on the issue of postage within and to the UK and points abroad. The Bill speaks of postage to residential addresses but does not specify if these are only UK addresses. Does this mean that a UK seller is forbidden from dispatching a knife in the post to a private residence in a country without such legislation? Such a thing would of course be even more absurd and damage our thriving industry of craftspeople and sellers which market their wares across Europe and beyond.
5. The Home Office has failed to justify new restrictions on the large calibre (.50 inches) sporting rifles or certain rifle actions and their promotion to Category 5 (banned) firearms. These arms are used by sportsmen such as myself and, to my knowledge, have not been used for criminal purposes in the UK for over two decades. Rifles in .50 calibre are large and unwieldy, thoroughly unsuited to common crime.
6. I, along with many sportsmen, am dismayed to see the use of emotive and false language in the Bill, calling these rifles 'material destruction' rifles, when there is no such thing outside the advertising of certain military items.
7. The term 'anti-material' applies rather to types of ammunition which is already prohibited under Section 5. The ammunition used by sporting target rifles in .50 calibre, as shown by the Fifty-Cal Shooting Association (UK FCSA) to the government as part of consultation, is suited to long-distance shooting of paper targets; against harder materials such as the ceramic plates used in police body armour, it shatters and warps so as to become ineffective. As such the fearmongering surrounding the 'killing of individuals even in body armour' with these rifles is, to my knowledge, a falsehood. Without body armour, of course, any ammunition can be lethal and this type, as used by sports men and women, is no more so than any others allowed by the Firearms Act. In short, nothing is achieved by prohibiting this type of rifle.
8. The second type of rifle addressed in the Bill, the 'MARS' (Manually Activated Release Systems) rifles, concerns a type of repeating action made by a Czech company. This action has been singled out because allegedly it makes the rate of fire too great. This is factually incorrect, as explained in the letter from the manufacture I have attached for your consideration, and I would add to that my own knowledge based on research of historical British military rifles of similar action: in short there is no great increase in rate of fire power between a single-shot breech-loader as allowed on the FAC, and the MARS. The action simply does not exceed the rate of fire of other actions and is not a semi-automatic rifle, which have been banned since the 1988 Hungerford tragedy.

9. The MARS action however, due to its particular design, offers a boon to certain disabled shooters who are unable operate other actions. The prohibition of the MARS action thus removes them from their lawful and moral pursuit of enjoyment, and deprives shooting fraternities of these members as active sportsmen and women.
10. Furthermore, again, the wording within the Bill is worrying. Concerning 'rapid firing' rifles in relation to the MARS action, it also opens to the door to the prohibition of other actions which, for over 150 years have been able to achieve a 'rapid rate'; anything more modern than the rifled musket of the 1840s, in fact.
11. During consultation, 78% of respondents objected to these and other restrictions outlined in the Bill, many of them professionals and experts with great knowledge in relevant fields. Yet, these objections are ignored, along with the evidence disclaiming the proposals presented by both the FCSA and other UK shooting sports bodies.

I look forward to seeing how the Committee addresses these points, though must make it clear:

Many of the Bill's articles do not contribute to our security as individual citizens or society at large for the simple fact that, as in the case of legislation concerning knives, there are always general-purpose tools which will kill and maim as easily; screwdrivers, kitchen knives, and other hand-tools – some 90% of knife crime concerns such items.

I doubt anyone in the UK re-enactment, shooting, fencing, knife-making, gun-making, woodcraft, blacksmithing etc. communities wish to see violent crime, but this bill has little thought behind it, all to their (unnecessary) expense.

Diverse people of these communities deserve the same respect as any other group of citizens with law-abiding and peaceable hobbies and sports. Restricting them will yield scant real security benefit. Instead, I recommend a look to the to the social, cultural and psychological issues that propel people to violence, gang-related or not, rather than seek to introduce legislation that ultimately only damages people's businesses, sports, and pastimes whilst further straining public services and budgets.

Yours sincerely,

Dr James R. Pritchett

July 2018



7th of December, 2017

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir, Madame,

This is to certify, that we tested the cyclical rate of fire of the M.A.R.S. Vz.58 Sporter and we found it mechanically unable to fire more than 2 rounds in 1 second. Compared to a semi-automatic firearm, the M.A.R.S. Vz.58 cyclical rate of fire is approximately 3 times slower than that of a semi-automatic firearm action where a semi-automatic firearm would be capable to fire 5 rounds or more in 1 second, this largely depending on how fast the shooter can pull, reset, and then pull the trigger again. The cyclical rate of fire of the M.A.R.S. Vz.58 is comparable, but definitely not faster than that which can be achieved with other firearm actions such as bolt action, straight pull, lever action, SMLE actions... (i.e. not automatic or semi-automatic actions) and, therefore, the M.A.R.S. Vz.58 cannot be rationally described as more or less dangerous as a result of its design.

Yours sincerely,



Czech Small Arms, s.r.o.
Jablůnka 651, 756 23
Česká republika
IČO: 28586859
DIČ: CZ28586859
info@csa.co.cz|www.csa.co.cz

①

Tomas Quis

Director General