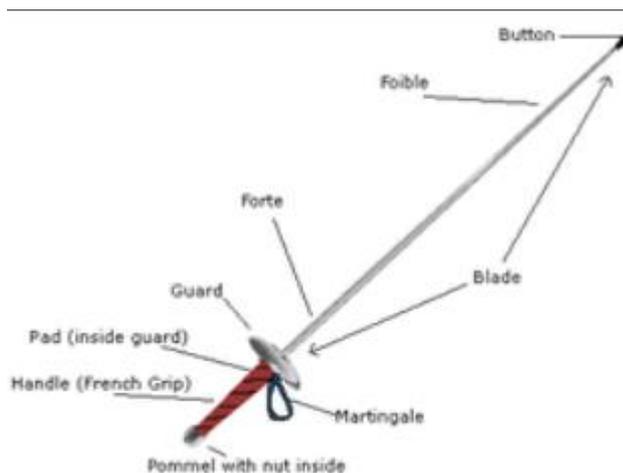


Written evidence submitted by Matthew Ball (OWB15)

I write to you concerning the Offensive Weapons Bill that is currently before for consideration. Now it goes without saying that the Government needs to respond to the rising levels of knife and gun crime, however having reviewed the current draft of the Bill I would like to bring to your attention several issues that I believe will demonstrate the proposed legislation will fail in its aims as well as imping on the rights and freedoms of ordinary law abiding people.

Section 17 Meaning of “bladed product”

Firstly the definition of this term is far too broad and is likely to cover items beyond that for what it is intended. As an example amongst my many hobbies is work working, in the pursuit of which I have and will need to order various tools such as chisels and saws. As there are various types of both equipment depending of the type of cut being made or the desired effect. Both of these would fall under the definition of a “bladed product” according to this legislation. Both have blades and both are capable of causing serious injury. In the past I have taken an active interest in the sport of fencing, all fencing weapons have a blade (as per the drawing below. They are also capable of causing serious injury dependant on their condition. With a definition as loose as this this bill will more than likely become to board to be useful.



Section 15 Delivery of bladed products to residential addresses

Taking into consideration the overly broad definition illustrated above it should not require much in the way of intelligence to work out that this will effect disproportionately more law abiding people than it will prevent people obtaining these weapons for illegal purposes. As I order almost all of my tools on-line, to ensure that I get the best value for money, why should I and others like me have to arrange for alternative collection procedures. Would it not make more sense for “bladed products” to required by law to be purchased on a credit card? Thus the seller can be as sure as possible that the purchaser is over the age of 18 and that the items must be shipped to the address where the card is registered.

Section 28 Prohibition of certain types of Firearms

In relation to suggested prohibition on certain types of firearms it is important to point out that the UK has arguably the most stringent gun laws in world. As a legal owner of firearms I am well aware of how easy it is to lose this right. If I were to do anything that demonstrates I am unfit to be trusted (convicted of drunk driving, allegation of assault), with these, they can be removed very swiftly. As a result of this the UK shooting community is the most law abiding in the country.

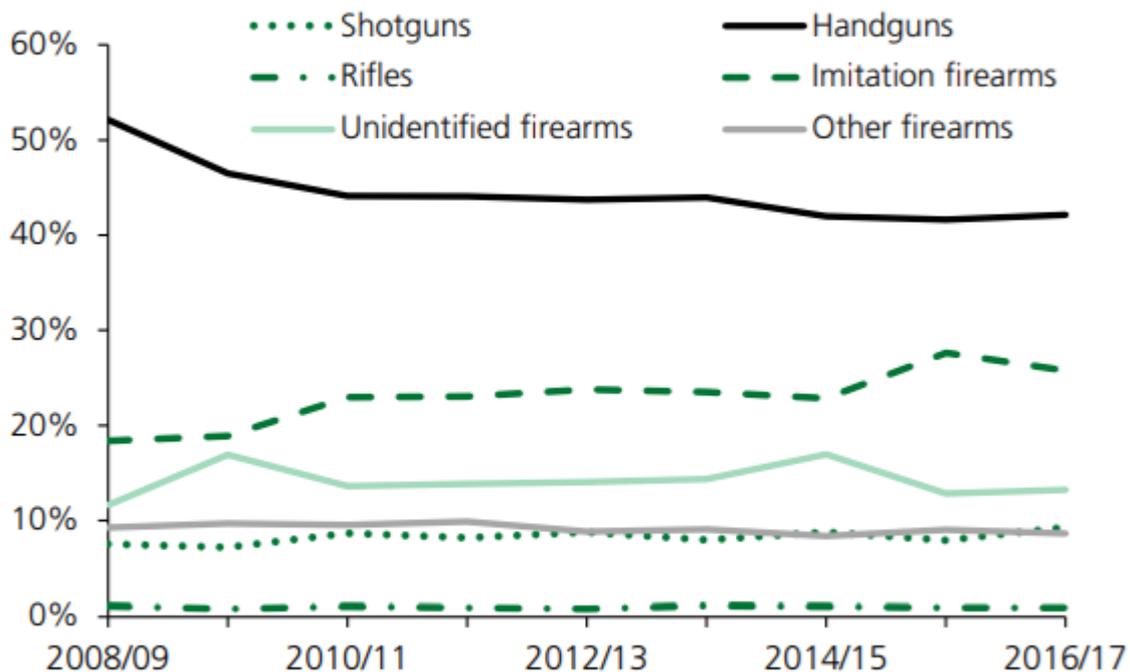
Now this proposed legislation aims to remove large calibre rifles such as the .50 calibre and what the government believe are rapid firing rifles such as the Leaver Release and the Mechanically Actuated Release System (MARS). In the consultation undertaken by the government on this issue 78% of online respondents (as well as email and postal) opposed the banning of large calibre and rapid firing rifles. Part of the questioning in the consultation focused on the 'material destruction' of rifles such as the .50 Calibre. This shows that the drafting of the consultation was flawed and designed to stirrup negative association to these weapons. The 'material destruction' properties of a rifle are not inherent to the weapon itself but are derived from the ammunition used. In the UK when applying for a Firearms License you have to ask for authority to hold a certain number of rounds and there are only two types of ammunition available in the UK, solid and expanding ammunition, the latter is only for live quarry hunting and you can't use a .50 calibre on anything living target in the UK. Target rounds are specifically engineered for accuracy they are not designed for penetration, so to suggest that they are is disingenuous.

The reason why such rifles are sought to be banned is the fear that they could fall into the wrong hands, such as terrorist or criminal gangs. Firstly there is no evidence of this! There has only ever been 1 .50 calibre stolen. These weapons despite being stored like all other firearms in approved safes, ammo locked away separately are large (in excess of 1.2m in overall length) and heavy (in excess of 6kg without ammo). They are impossible to conceal and difficult to transport. The numbers of such weapons in the UK is very small due to their cost and the limited number of places that they can be legally fired so the chances of them falling into the hands of the wrong people.

The so called "rapid firing" rifles are also small in number being popular among precision shooters and disabled shooters for the same reason, they require less physical movement to operate in comparison to a bolt action rifle. This is important to the disabled shooter for obvious reasons and being able to maintain a consistent posture on the rifle can be the difference between a hit or a miss to a target shooter. As a point of reference from my own experience, the act of breathing whilst aiming a rifle at 100 yards can move the point of impact by as much as 1.5 inches. It is important to stress that we are not talking about semi-automatic rifles here, these are already illegal in the UK in centre fire calibres (the only exception is the .22 longrifle rim fire rifle). A semi-automatic rifle will fire one round, and chamber the next for every pull of the trigger. The weapons being targeted by this legislation will fire one round per pull of the trigger but will not chamber the next round till the shooter performs an additional step such as releases a leave.

In terms of why the prohibition of both these weapon types is futile I would draw your attention to the House of Commons Library Briefing Paper No. CBP 7654, [Firearm Crime Statistics: England & Wales](#). Specifically, page 8 section 3 Types of Firearms used.

6. FIREARM OFFENCES BY NON-AIR FIREARM TYPE



Source: ONS, Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2017, *Offences involving the use of weapons: data tables*, table 2, 8 February 2018

The two types of Firearms targeted by this legislation are both classified as Rifles. Between the period indicated on the graph a total of 55,825 (6,375 in 16/17) offences were committed, of these 545 (61 in 16/17) were committed using Rifles, which is 0.9%! According to the Office for National Statistics at 31/03/2017 there were 154,958 Firearms Licenses covering 559,302 Firearms and from figures I have seen in the shooting press there could be as few as 2,000 rifles prohibited under this bill. So this Bill will do nothing to address the current level of gun crime as it is targeting the wrong types of weapons. If further proof were needed that this latest gun ban will not work, then ask why if handguns are banned in UK are they the biggest single group on the above graph? This ban will not make the public safer all it will do is remove the right legal law-abiding shooter to continue practising their sport with their current rifles.

The parts of the proposed legislation should be removed from the bill as they are not fit for purpose. If the government were serious about tackling the issues of both knife and gun crime then it would be better to increase the penalties available under current legislation, such as mandatory sentence of 10 years for possession of an illegal firearm and investing in Police numbers so there is a visible presence on the streets.

Kind regards

Matthew Ball

3 July 2018