

## Written evidence submitted by Dr Karl Gensberg (OWB154)

Dear Sirs,

I am submitting this document in a personal capacity, as these proposed new firearms restrictions will not only have an impact on my (shooting) hobby, but also because it seems very clear to me that they will only penalise law-abiding firearms owners and taxpayers in general. I have referred to government statistics in support of my conclusions. In addition, it appears that the local MP elected to represent my interests and have an impact on implementation of these proposed new restrictions has no clear understanding of shooting sports in general, and the MARS-action rifle in particular, so I am requesting that the committee resists the urge for "knee-jerk" legislation in the erroneous belief that gun bans equate to gun crime reduction, since gun laws only apply to law-abiding citizens. The MARS-action rifle in particular is intrinsically safer than its semi-automatic version and can be an effective platform for shooters with a disability. Finally, I suggest that likely terrorists be scrutinised instead of restricting the choices and freedoms of licensed firearms owners, the most law-abiding of UK citizens.

I am an owner of a MARS rifle. It is an accurate, easy-to-use, reliable and lightweight rifle, made in the Czech Republic.

It is **not** a semi-automatic rifle - these were banned in the UK in 1988.

It is **not** a "machine gun" - these were banned in the UK in 1936.

Therefore, it is not an "assault rifle", because an "assault rifle" must be capable of both semi-automatic and fully-automatic fire.

I have heard that both MARS rifles and .50 calibre rifles are to be banned to make it impossible for legal owners to be a source of these rifles for terrorists.

The "Briefing Paper CBP 7654 Table A2 of Firearm Crime Statistics: England and Wales" reveals that in 2016/17 there were 2,685 handgun offences and only 61 involving rifles (out of a total of 6,375 firearm offences excluding air weapons). **This equates to 42% of firearm offences in which handguns are used compared to less than 1% (0.95%) for rifles.**

which clearly demonstrates that

**1. criminals do not obtain their weapons from licensed owners.**

Handguns are still predominantly used in armed crime even though they were banned twenty years ago;

**2. the handgun ban achieved little with respect to handgun crime**, apart from penalising both the law-abiding owners, and the taxpayer in general whose taxes were used to compensate the legitimate owners for their loss;

**3. rifle crime comprises only a tiny percentage of armed crime**; even if a total rifle ban were to be introduced, it would have no effect in reducing gun crime in general, and little effect in rifle crime (as demonstrated by the handgun ban and handgun crime).

**In addition, and most importantly, .50 cal and MARS rifles have never been used in any crime.**

Clearly, then, this latest proposed ban will achieve nothing in crime reduction, but it will **punish and alienate legitimate firearms owners**. These legitimate owners are more thoroughly vetted and knowledgeable in their hobby than those involved in its regulation.

To illustrate this point, I wrote to my **MP, Wendy Morton**, about this matter. In her reply, she referred to the MARS rifle as "a potentially lethal assault rifle" and stated: "I personally can see no reason why, in 2017, someone living in the United Kingdom would have the need to own a MARS Action Target Rifle, even for hunting purposes."

I find this terribly worrying because, not only does she appear to have no accurate notion of what constitutes an "assault rifle", she implies that unless something is "needed", it shouldn't be allowed. I agree, there is no *need* for a MARS or .50 cal rifle, just as there is no *need* for "potentially lethal" golf clubs, croquet mallets, cricket bats, etc etc. These are hobbies which citizens in a democratic society are free to enjoy.

**Thus, potential policy making in this area is flawed; the *real* problem of terrorism is effectively ignored in favour of some illusory gain by punishing law-abiding citizens.** Also, banning MARS and .50 calibre rifles to prevent the future possibility of their somehow falling into the hands of terrorists sets a dangerous precedent. Anything which the state might deem to present a possible future hazard could be banned without any serious consideration.

Finally, a friend at my shooting club was injured while serving his country in Afghanistan. His injury means that my MARS rifle is his perfect target rifle. However, he cannot afford to buy his own because the UK MARS version costs in excess of £2000 so that it complies with current UK legislation. The original (and much more common) european version, i.e. with a semi-automatic action, would cost around £800, and be a far more tempting proposition for a would-be terrorist.

Therefore, I am suggesting that taxpayers' money be spent on the actual problem - terrorism - not the harmless hobby of a few enthusiasts. **It seems to me that penalising law-abiding firearms certificate holders while, for instance, allowing known ISIS terrorists to return unmolested to the UK from Syria is somewhat misguided.**

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