

Written evidence submitted by Matthew Hartley (OWB183)

Introduction:

I believe law should both be effective and target causes of crime rather than seek to target lawful activities or the symptoms of the crime. Whilst efforts to reduce violent crime are to be encouraged, this Bill contains dangerous precedents and the Bill aims to ban items without evidence or dealing with the causes of the crimes which is not acceptable. This Bill is an attack and discrimination towards young people and those who use corrosives, knives and firearms in their day to day lives for hobbies, work or just to live.

I will go into a few of these issue; this is by no means exhaustive of all the issues with this Bill.

My experience and qualifications for supplying evidence:

Firearms: Over two decades of shooting experience in both target and pest control, Section 1 and 2 licence holder, secretary of a Home Office approved rifle club, committee member of a second rifle Home Office approved rifle club.

Corrosives: Degree in science and worked in the chemical industry for over a decade.

Knives: Interest in historical objects as well as home (kitchen and workshop) and field use.

Original Bill:

1) Rapid firing and high energy rifles.

A) Firearm owners are one of the most law-abiding groups in the country. Strict laws prevent those unsuitable from obtaining them via the licensing system. This ban aims to take away lawful property on the “*what if*” they will be used in the future in an irresponsible manner. This sets a very dangerous precedent. No evidence was given in support of this “*what if*” and who knows what may be banned next on via the process of “*we think this might be dangerous*” or because certain Authorities or the Home Office do not like it.

Whilst committee members may not personally support personal ownership of these firearms or any others, it may not be firearms which are banned next on a whim.

B) The Consultation document seems to have been ignored on this issue. When a much higher percentage of the consultation was against the ban, how is the most extreme version of the options given in the consultation being the one being put forward to be put into law? Why consult at all if it is to be ignored?

C) Despite not being disabled myself, I believe the quote from the link¹ to be untrue.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/717685/Policy_Equality_Statement.pdf<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/go>

However, I cannot prove this as I do not have access to all the documents submitted.

“Following the public consultation, concern was raised on the potential impact that banning rapid firing rifles such as the VZ58 Manually Actuated Release System (MARS) rifle could have on disabled shooters. Respondents outlined that some disabled shooters rely on this weapon to participate in the activity of shooting and that the banning of this particular firearm could have some impact on their ability to do so. However, no evidence was produced on how or why they would adversely affect disabled shooters, for example, that these are the only types of weapons they can use, nor what forms of disability would rely on this weapon. Therefore we do not anticipate any differential impact from this proposal.”

When the consultation document came out there I believe there were disabled shooters who used these firearms for this exact reason that responded. I feel they are being ignored so that the Bill can be put forward, knowing that if it was found to be discriminating, the government would not be able to include this section of the Bill.

Despite being a taboo and vilified sport, shooting is a very inclusive and safe hobby. You will find mixed ages, all genders, able bodied, disabled, a full variety of racial heritages and religious individuals all able to compete and enjoy the sport on equal levels. Very few sports offer this. Bans like this only harm the sport.

D) I present the following evidence from Parliamentary sources².

Whist you may read it all at your leisure, the conclusion of relevance in this case is:

“ RECOMMENDATIONS

65. To extend the existing legislation would be unwise.”

E) I have to wonder where their sums came from, I suspect that any compensation will be higher than that suggested due to the cost of these firearms. Also, where is this money for this compensation coming from?

F) Whilst the UK has pushed towards more bans of firearms over the years, the results have not been as desired. Shootings with short barrelled firearms (cartridge handguns) have continued despite being essentially banned (moved to Section 5). The legislation has not had the desired consequence.

To link sporting shooting to gun crime is grossly misleading³.

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nt.pdf](#)

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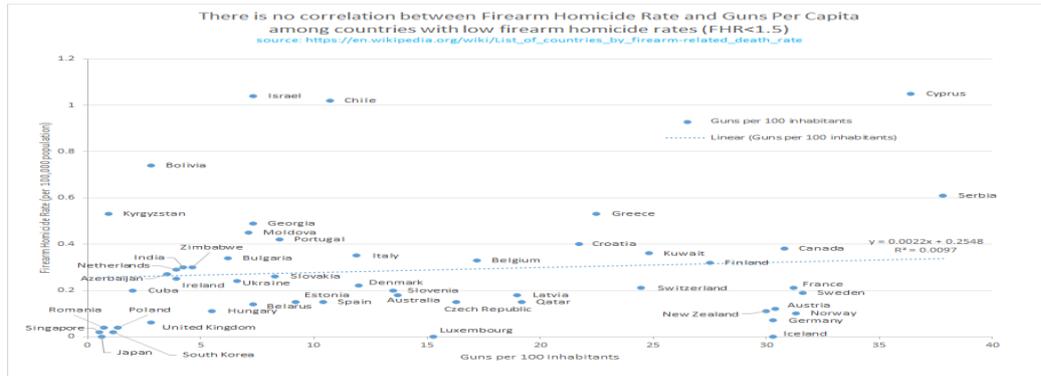
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmhaff/95/95ap69.htm><https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmhaff/95/95ap69.htm>

³ <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7654/CBP-7654.pdf>

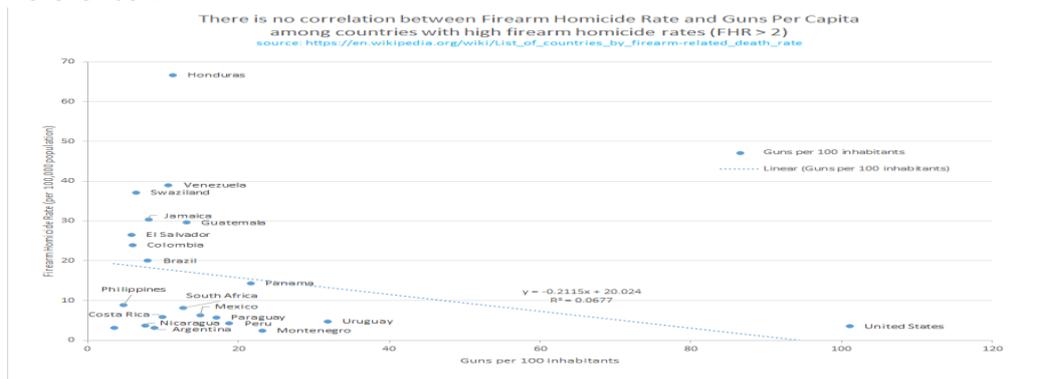
“Rifles (**which these two types of firearm fall under**) have remained the least common non-air firearms type accounting for around 1% of all offences over the period.” It should also be noted that there have been zero crimes committed with these types of UK legal firearms. (In bold my addition).

It is also worth noting that the causality between gun ownership and crime is not linked:

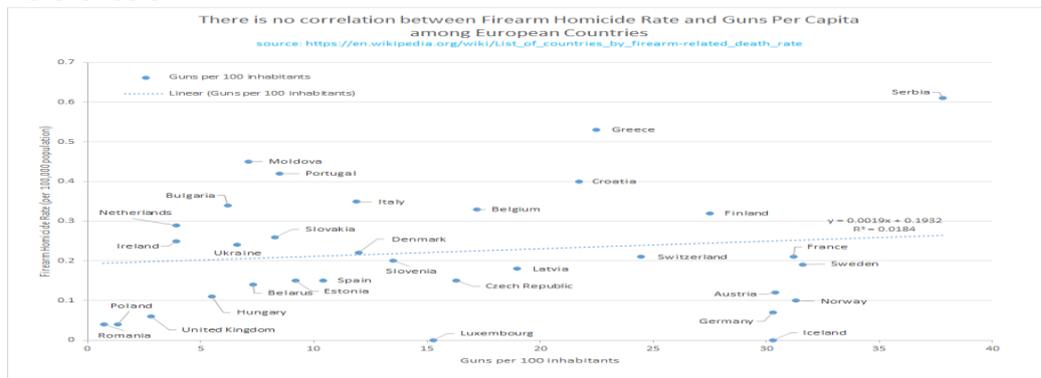
Reference 1⁴:



Reference 2⁵:



Reference 3⁶:



⁴ https://cdn-images-1.medium.com/max/1000/1*DYEWVlxGEzMwTNqGFJSLuw.png

⁵ https://cdn-images-1.medium.com/max/1600/1*qkttu1NCvSeoKv824G02pw.png

⁶ https://cdn-images-1.medium.com/max/1600/1*C-ZbC3a4E5Zz6lt4bhnuUQ.png

G) Recently Canada has started to look into banning hand guns and despite political will (as with this Bill, to be seen to be doing something, even if it will have zero effect) the Head of Toronto's Police union said⁷ a handgun ban won't stop shootings. I believe the same is true here, banning these types of firearm will have zero effect on criminal-based shooting and only penalize lawful sporting shooters.

“There's no way in my world or any world I know that this would have an impact on somebody who's going to go out and buy an illegal gun and use it to kill another person or shoot another person.”

2) Sale of knives.

A) This is a knee jerk reaction. If someone under the age of 18 wants a knife there are many ways in which they can source them. Knives judging by the photos of knives taken off the street/confiscated or handed in during amnesties by the police (evidenced by the photos they show) are mostly used kitchen knives which are required for food preparation and cutting before eating. These may be taken from any given kitchen or place of work, these may not be noticed as missing, online sales are both more expensive and traceable.

Why would an individual spend money getting something mail ordered when they are easily accessible? All this Bill does is make it harder for lives of law abiding people who may want specialist knives for kitchen, sport, hobbies, work or collecting, etc. As knives (partially kitchen knives) are available in the home and work environment, it will have zero effect on knife crime.

Premium brands costing £100s of pounds are unlikely to be ordered for this purpose, yet will get caught up in this legislation.

B) This part of the act tries to pretend that the Government is doing something about knife crime whilst achieving nothing. This part of the Bill does nothing to deal with the underline causes of knife crime or why certain parts of the population (illegally) feel they need to carry a knife. This makes for bad law.

C) The way the Bill is written:

“(a) is or has a blade,”

This may / will include many tools including saws, used for gardening, crafts and woodwork and industry. Individuals using these tools may live in more rural settings. Specialist tools (and normal larger tool shops) may not be available and these individuals use the postal service to receive these tools.

D) What constitutes a blade and what will be banned next? Scissors, screw drivers, hammers golf clubs, cricket clubs, vehicles (as witnessed by the various recent terrorist atrocities and hate crimes) etc can all be used as weapons. Will these all be banned eventually?

⁷ https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.4807778?_twitter_impression=true

Vehicles are a good example: The fact that these are now being employed as weapons shows that existing law is already achieving its purpose as those wishing to use weapons cannot gain access to them but also that banning or licensing items leads to improvisation and other items being used. Creating new law banning object does not prevent crime rather just changes the weapon of choice. Education and the targeting of the causes of crime and terrorist activity is required instead!

Even if the Bill is successful (which I believe is unlikely) the effect will move those who wish to carry something to more improvised devices “shanks” (such as sharpened screw drivers etc) and so will not prevent the carrying of weapons.

3) Knives on educational grounds.

A) If it is already illegal to carry a knife without good reason, then what is the point of this? Any individual found with a knife there, will have already failed having the knife in a public place good reason exception by transporting it there. This is making laws for laws sake and again bad law.

B) A knife is a tool, one which may be required in the educational world. Educational grounds such as colleges may not just teach vocational subjects but trade skills. Adults may wish to use their own equipment and this makes this illegal and puts greater cost on these establishments.

C) A knife being a tool means that those studying at university who are old enough to possess a knife will not be able to do so. Higher level biology, medicine etc. uses knives such as scalpels and it is encouraged/required for students studying these to have their own kits. This will make these illegal for students and put further cost on universities.

Re-enactors, historians and those who teach history sometimes use or display these items on educational properties. This Bill would adversely affect education.

Reference, Previous submission to the Public Bill Committee.⁸

4) Prohibiting knives that are currently legal.

A) For this purpose I include tools, antiques, flick knives, curved blades longer than 50 cm and zombie knives. These knives do no harm, the vast majority are held by law abiding individuals who have no wish to use them illegally. Many are expensive and these various knives are not used in criminal activity. Whether they are used as tools, for sport, re-enactment or display etc is irrelevant. This is the criminalisation of those who are not criminal. Many may have these not on display and forgotten about in lofts etc where they are of no danger.

Antiques have been exempted from the Offensive Weapons Act and Amendments, since

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1988. The so-called 'samurai sword ban' also specifically exempts antiques. The evidence does not show that antiques are used in crime, why ban these now?

B) Re-enactment use historical blades. These are often curved and over 50cm. This will impact on re-enactment displays which are a great way of showing history and getting individuals interested in studying history.

C) As mentioned earlier, the way the Bill is written:

"(a) is or has a blade,"

This may include many tools including saws, used for gardening, crafts and wood work and industry.

D) This law will criminalise people for ownership of an object that they have no intention of using for an illegal purpose. This criminalises the majority for the actions of a small minority. This is again bad law.

5) Postage to business addresses.

A) A business can operate from a private residence. How is this considered?

B) How will age verification take place at a business. A parcel delivered to a business may well be delivered to a reception and then given to the individual. How will age verification be completed? If packages were marked age verification required, at a shop which sells age restricted product (where staff will have received training in age verification), this may be acceptable and enforceable. However, how would this be expected to take place in other environments and how can it be enforced?

C) How does the Bill intend to deal with bladed objects being sent from a location outside of the UK? These would not necessarily be picked up at Customs and may not have any age verification placed on them or be sent to a business?

D) Physical stores can only stock so many knives; there is a much greater choice available to the individual online. This Bill will make customer choice more difficult and potentially put specialist traders (especially smaller brands) in danger or out of business.

E) The consultation document received 63% of responses against a ban on postage to residential address; once again the public response is being ignored.

6) Sale of corrosives.

Example: Section 1 of the Bill defines a corrosive product *"as being a product that contains more than 15% Sulfuric acid"*

This is again a pointless exercise. If someone wishes to obtain acid there are many ways. Many batteries contain acid and could be damaged in a way to obtain the material from

within. However, the most obvious source is from car batteries this has unforeseen repercussions seemingly. The legislation will seemingly make the purchase of a car as it contains a battery illegal for under 18s. As cars, bikes, golf buggies, mobility aids all contain batteries, the purchase of these by under 18 (under 21 if some amendments pass) then maybe come illegal.

It is currently legal to have a driver's licence and therefore operate a motor vehicle at 17 and a moped or scooter at 16, this would put someone at under 18 with good reason to buy a battery and gain access to acid. Banning the sale of batteries to under 18 would prevent the ownership or maintenance of their vehicle and thus discriminate against young persons/drivers.

Mobily scooters have batteries. Some of these batteries maybe the lead acid type that contain Sulphuric acid at >15%. This Bill would prevent an under 18 from buying one and therefore is potentially discriminating against young disabled individuals.

Car battery acid from a lead acid battery usually contains 30-50% sulfuric acid (H₂SO₄) in water, this is above the 15% mentioned in the Bill.⁹

The way the Bill defines corrosive substances will have a major impact on many products, services and providers that contain or use corrosive substances in order to function (such as batteries).

AMENDMENTS:

1) Offense to sell knives to under 21.

This lacks any common sense, an individual of that age may not live at home. Students and those who permanently move out will not be able to buy basic kitchen equipment or an individual that is below 21 but over 18 who is self-employed maybe unable to purchase required equipment, etc. This clearly has not been thought through.

2) NC28 - To make it an offence to purchase or acquire shotgun ammunition without a valid firearm certificate.

Once more the complete lack of thought that has gone into this is obvious. Having a Section 2 (shotgun certificate) certificate to buy a shotgun but then not being able to buy the ammunition without a section 1 licence (firearms licence) makes no sense. Individuals who can buy shotgun ammunition have already been vetted. There is no need to move this ammunition onto section 1. All this does is add extra bureaucracy onto the system for the police to deal with.

3) Prohibition of air weapons on private land for those under the age of 18.

What purpose does this serve? Many under 18s do this both safely and legally. All this does

⁹ www.thoughtco.com/acid-chemical-structures-gallery-4071297

is punish legally behaving under 18s.

4) Purchase of offensive weapons from outside the European Union (EU).

A) Where proper and lawful procedures are followed what does it matter where an item is brought?

B) We are leaving the EU so why limit ourselves to EU countries?

C) The EU's laws may change etc and become incompatible with UK law or adversely affect UK citizens.

5) Prohibition of bladed product displays.

Bladed objects are everyday life essentials. Being able to see and choose even cutlery should not be made difficult. Being able to see and compare something you wish to purchase should not be made difficult.

Conclusion:

Overall conclusion this Bill and its potential amendments; I personally believe:

A) This Bill contains potentially discriminating proposals.

B) This Bill contains law, which has been advised against.

C) This Bill contains bad law, which does nothing to address the underlying causes of crime.

D) This makes the law ineffective as it will either be ignored or criminals will find other means / weapons.

E) This Bill changes the way of life for law-abiding subjects for reasons that which are not evidence based.

F) This Bill punishes law-abiding subjects for the actions of criminal minorities.

G) Current laws are sufficient if enforced properly.

H) It needs to be scrapped immediately. If the government wishes to re-examine, each section should be put forward individually so they can be more carefully scrutinised after changes have been made so that it is both evidence based and addresses the causes of crimes and not the object, tools and / or substances used.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

M.Hartley, BSc

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