

Written evidence submitted by Ben Freeston (OWB68)

1. I am writing to voice my concerns over the debate to make changes to the Offensive Weapons Act with regards to banning the use of high muzzle energy (inc. .50 calibre) and MARS rifles which can currently be legally held and used by firearms licence holders. The argument being used is that there is the potential for these weapons to be used in violent crime by terrorist and criminals.
2. I was a victim of violent crime in Bristol in 2001 when I was attacked and stabbed whilst walking home through the city centre at night. Because of this incident, I think I have a better insight than most on the effect this type of crime has on victims and their families.
3. I obviously appreciate any action taken by the Government and Police to prevent violent crime, but it appears that the legal shooting community are being used as an easy target so that the Government can be seen to be taking action against violent crime. However, when one looks at the published crime figures, taking into account the expected variations from year to year, the general trend is that knife crime is increasing, and firearms crime is reducing. See below:

A1: SELECTED OFFENCES INVOLVING A KNIFE OR SHARP INSTRUMENT

Violent and sexual offences recorded by the police, England and Wales

Time period	Attempted murder	Threats to kill	Assault with injury and intent to cause serious harm	Robbery	Rape	Sexual assault	Homicide	Total selected offences including homicide
Year ending March								
2010/11 ¹	240	1,462	13,941	16,438	258	93	237	32,669
2011/12	246	1,183	12,621	16,417	237	72	211	30,987
2012/13 ²	198	1,188	11,343	13,194	190	88	196	26,397
2013/14	248	1,317	11,551	11,910	261	97	204	25,588
2014/15	273	1,718	13,115	10,324	321	127	187	26,065
2015/16	345	2,195	15,144	10,528	334	119	212	28,877
2016/17	357	2,751	17,792	12,992	413	180	215	34,700
% Change								
2015/16 -								
2016/17	3.5%	25.3%	17.5%	23.4%	23.7%	51.3%	1.4%	20.2%
2010/11 -								
2016/17	48.8%	88.2%	27.6%	-21.0%	60.1%	93.5%	-9.3%	6.2%
Year ending September								
2016	348	2,510	16,220	11,169	350	133	211	30,941
2017	373	2,805	18,571	14,816	449	191	238	37,443
Proportion of selected offences involving a knife or sharp instrument								
2010/11 ¹	0.7%	4.5%	42.7%	50.3%	0.8%	0.3%	0.7%	
2011/12	0.8%	3.8%	40.7%	53.0%	0.8%	0.2%	0.7%	
2012/13 ²	0.8%	4.5%	43.0%	50.0%	0.7%	0.3%	0.7%	
2013/14	1.0%	5.1%	45.1%	46.5%	1.0%	0.4%	0.8%	
2014/15	1.0%	6.6%	50.3%	39.6%	1.2%	0.5%	0.7%	
2015/16	1.2%	7.6%	52.4%	36.5%	1.2%	0.4%	0.7%	
2016/17	1.0%	7.9%	51.3%	37.4%	1.2%	0.5%	0.6%	
Year ending September								
2016	1.1%	8.1%	52.4%	36.1%	1.1%	0.4%	0.7%	
2017	1.0%	7.5%	49.6%	39.6%	1.2%	0.5%	0.6%	

Notes:

1. West Midlands included unbroken bottle and glass offences in their data returns until April 2010 but now exclude these offences in line with most other forces. As such, the data from 2010/11 are not directly comparable with earlier years.

2. Changes to offence codes in April 2012 mean the category of Assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm is not directly comparable with previous years.

Sources:

ONS, Crime and Justice Statistics, [Appendix tables - focus on violent crime and sexual offences, Table 3.14](#), February 2017 and earlier editions

Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2017, [Offences involving the use of weapons: data tables](#), table 11.051

Source - House of Commons briefing paper SN4304 (Table A1)

A4: FIREARM OFFENCES BY OFFENCE GROUP, YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	% change 2015/16- 2016/17
Non-air firearms										
Violence against the person	2,216	2,351	2,266	1,937	1,592	1,462	1,540	1,898	2,202	16%
Robbery	3,576	3,607	2,925	2,533	2,172	1,951	1,690	1,528	1,663	9%
Burglary	157	195	147	139	97	112	108	110	201	83%
Criminal damage	528	451	374	333	335	330	320	287	477	66%
Public fear, alarm or distress	263	259	261	203	200	225	317	323	363	12%
Possession of weapons	1,193	971	828	653	557	579	674	816	1,128	38%
Other firearm offences	266	248	239	224	205	197	262	220	341	55%
All non-air weapon offences	8,199	8,082	7,040	6,022	5,158	4,856	4,911	5,182	6,375	23%
All firearms										
Violence against the person	3,045	3,111	2,822	2,366	2,017	1,862	1,908	2,261	2,614	16%
Robbery	3,615	3,663	2,975	2,567	2,206	1,977	1,715	1,551	1,691	9%
Burglary	167	205	155	151	102	114	112	113	211	87%
Criminal damage	5,158	4,097	3,571	3,002	2,426	2,439	2,513	2,449	2,629	7%
Public fear, alarm or distress ⁵	307	306	314	230	217	246	334	342	388	13%
Possession of weapons ⁵	1,456	1,154	994	781	657	673	785	897	1,236	38%
Other firearm offences	492	477	504	435	510	418	498	786	809	3%
All firearm offences	14,240	13,013	11,335	9,532	8,135	7,729	7,865	8,399	9,578	14%

Note:

Prior to year ending March 2005, air weapon offences were recorded as homicide, attempted murder, other violence against the person, robbery, burglary, criminal damage or other offences. Therefore, possession of weapons and public fear alarm or distress offences for air weapons prior to this date are included in 'other' within violence against the person offences.

Source:

[Source: ONS. Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2017. Offences involving the use of weapons: data tables. table 8. 18 February 2018](#)

Source - House of Commons briefing paper CBP7654 (Table A4)

4. It should also be noted that changes in legislation on legally held firearms has little or no effect on criminal activities. Handguns/pistols were banned from ownership in 1996 but they still remain the firearm of choice for criminals as they are easy to conceal. Rifles on the other hand are used relatively rarely in crime:

A5: FIREARM OFFENCES RESULTING IN INJURY, YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	% change 2015/16-2016/17
Non-air firearms										
Total non-air weapon injuries	1,760	1,914	1,952	1,617	1,309	1,107	1,041	1,250	1,403	12%
of which:										
Fatal injury	39	39	59	42	30	27	19	26	31	19%
Serious injury	319	337	295	255	170	162	146	202	231	14%
Slight injury	1,402	1,538	1,598	1,320	1,109	918	876	1,022	1,141	12%
No injury	6,439	6,168	5,088	4,405	3,849	3,749	3,870	3,932	4,972	26%
Total non-air firearm offences	8,199	8,082	7,040	6,022	5,158	4,856	4,911	5,182	6,375	23%
All firearm offences (injuries)										
Total weapon injuries	2,453	2,570	2,402	1,972	1,668	1,433	1,340	1,520	1,716	13%
of which:										
Fatal injury	39	40	59	42	30	29	19	26	31	19%
Serious injury	391	404	330	285	204	208	183	232	256	10%
Slight injury	2,023	2,126	2,013	1,645	1,434	1,196	1,138	1,262	1,429	13%
No injury	11,787	10,443	8,933	7,547	6,467	6,296	6,525	6,879	7,862	14%
All firearm offences	14,240	13,013	11,335	9,519	8,135	7,729	7,865	8,399	9,578	14%

Notes:

Injuries could be caused by either the firearm being fired or used as a blunt instrument.

'Fatal injury' includes the 12 people killed by Derrick Bird on 2 June 2010.

Number of fatal injuries where a firearm has been involved in an offence may differ from the number of homicides by shooting. This is due to offences where a firearm has been involved but shooting h

Additionally, Homicide Index figures include crossbows which are excluded from the firearms collection.

A serious injury is one which requires a stay in hospital or involves fractures, concussion, severe general shock, penetration by a bullet or multiple shot wounds.

Source:

[Source: ONS, Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2017, Offences involving the use of weapons: data tables, table 5, 18 February 2018](#)

Source - House of Commons briefing paper CBP7654 (Table A5)

5. The above figures don't identify whether the firearms used were legally held or not. Without evidence to the contrary, considering pistols were banned from legal ownership in 1996 one has to assume that the majority of the offences above were carried out using illegal firearms. Data identifying criminal use of legally held fire arms should be made public and any changes in legislation should be based on this evidence. For example, I have been unable to identify a criminal use of .50 calibre or MARS rifles in England and Wales ever, so why would owners of these weapons be prevented from owning and using them in a safe manner on an appropriate Home Office approved range?

12 July 2018