

ARMS CONTROL STRATEGIES

Debunking the myths

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Myth: Registering every firearm enhances the physical control of firearms

- The NZ experience (Thorp, 1997).
 - Assistance which registration would provide to crime prevention and detection does not of itself justify the cost.
 - In order to be effective registration needs to reach a high threshold.
- The New Zealand database remains inaccurate
 - despite maintaining records of only pistols, MSSAs and restricted weapons; and despite a ten yearly audit. (Police operational source)
- After 10 years of legislated universal registration neither Canada or Australia have evidenced reaching this threshold.

The Australian experience

- Overwhelming majority of firearms used in homicide between 1 July 1997 and 30 June 1999 were not registered and the offenders were not licensed. Mouzos (2000: 4).
- Trend in firearms related deaths not linked to post 1996 initiatives. (NISU, 2005).
- Number of firearms related suicides has decreased steadily since 1987 (ABS).
- Firearms related homicides increased marginally compared to total number of firearms 1915-2003 (ABS).
- Registration regime has not enabled firearms to be tracked accurately.

The Canadian experience

- ‘No convincing empirical evidence can be found that the firearms program has improved public safety’ (Mauser, 2007).
 - Downward trend in suicide by firearm in Canada cannot be attributed to legislated registration.
 - Cost rises from estimate of CDN\$2 million in 2002, to CDN\$1 billion by 2005.
- Canadian government considering eliminating the requirement to register non restricted firearms (Bill C-24, October 2007).
 - To re-focus on licensing of individuals as fit and proper to possess firearms.

Myth: banning the possession of firearms will reduce crime United Kingdom

- Virtually all legally held handguns confiscated between July 1997 and February 1998.
 - Paid 95 million pounds compensation. (Greenwood, 2006).
 - Pistol clubs turned to shooting pistol calibre carbines.
- Increase in homicide with pistols.
 - ‘The ban on handguns is neither here nor there in the equation’ (Greenwood, 2006).
 - Of 80 firearms offenders interviewed, 57% (n=41) of them used handguns (UK Home Office, 2006).

Myth: Banning the possession of firearms will reduce crime Australia

- 2002 Australia introduced a national handgun control agreement.
- Since that agreement there has been an increase in homicides by handgun and a high level of diversion of handguns to the illicit market.
- NSW Police subsequently establishes a special unit to address increased handgun crime.

Myth: Rendering firearms inoperable (deactivated) will remove them from use

- United Kingdom and Australia recognise (in varying ways) the deactivation of firearms.
- ‘Deactivated’ and ‘deregistered’ firearms ‘reactivated’ and found in criminal hands in Australia and the UK.

(Australian Crime Commission (2006) and New Scotland Yard (2000))

Myth: buyback gets unlawfully held guns out of the community and reduces crime

- Australian buyback. 640 000 firearms were collected

- Mouzos & Reuter (2003):

Difficult to link buyback to violence reduction.

Availability of one form of firearm not likely to have much effect on homicide and suicide.

Declines in total homicide and firearm homicide a long term trend.

- 'The ban on handguns is neither here nor there in the equation' (Greenwood, 2006).

Myth: that increasing penalties will deter firearms offending

‘The 5 year mandatory minimum sentence for possession of a firearm was well known (but those interviewed were serving prison sentences). Longer sentences might bring about counter-productive outcomes, such as offenders trying to “shoot their way out” if challenged by Police’.

(Source: UK Home Office, 2006)

Myth: that centralised armouries enhance control of firearms

- UK: people can retain .22 target pistols, to be secured at the shooting club. (Greenwood, 2006).
- Requiring firearms to be lodged in central armouries encourages poor security practice – firearms subsequently left insecure.
- Centralised armouries provide a centralised point for criminals to take firearms from.

(NZ Police operational source)

Myth: that pistols, military style semi automatics and restricted weapons present a special risk to the community

- Shotgun and rifle firearms of choice of NZ criminal – (Newbold, 1999).
- Firearms reported seized under the provisions of the Arms Act 1983:

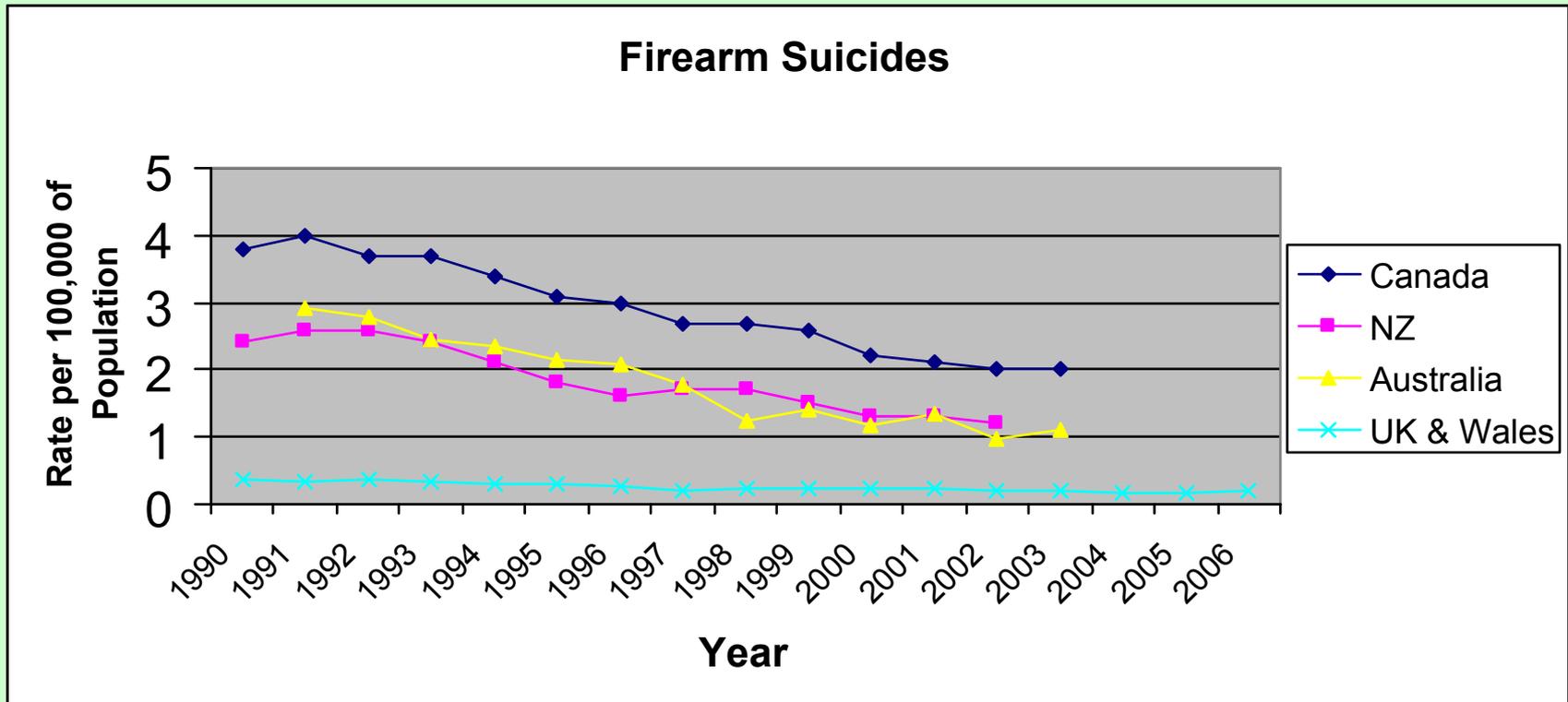
rifles	36%	(n=508)
shotguns	25%	(n=347)
pistols	5%	(n=70)
cut down rifle	1%	(n=21)
MSSA	2%	(n=25)
airgun	29%	(n=405)

Total seized: 1,413

(New Zealand Police. Report on seizures under Arms Act 1983, 2004-2006)

Suicide by firearm – a long downward trend line

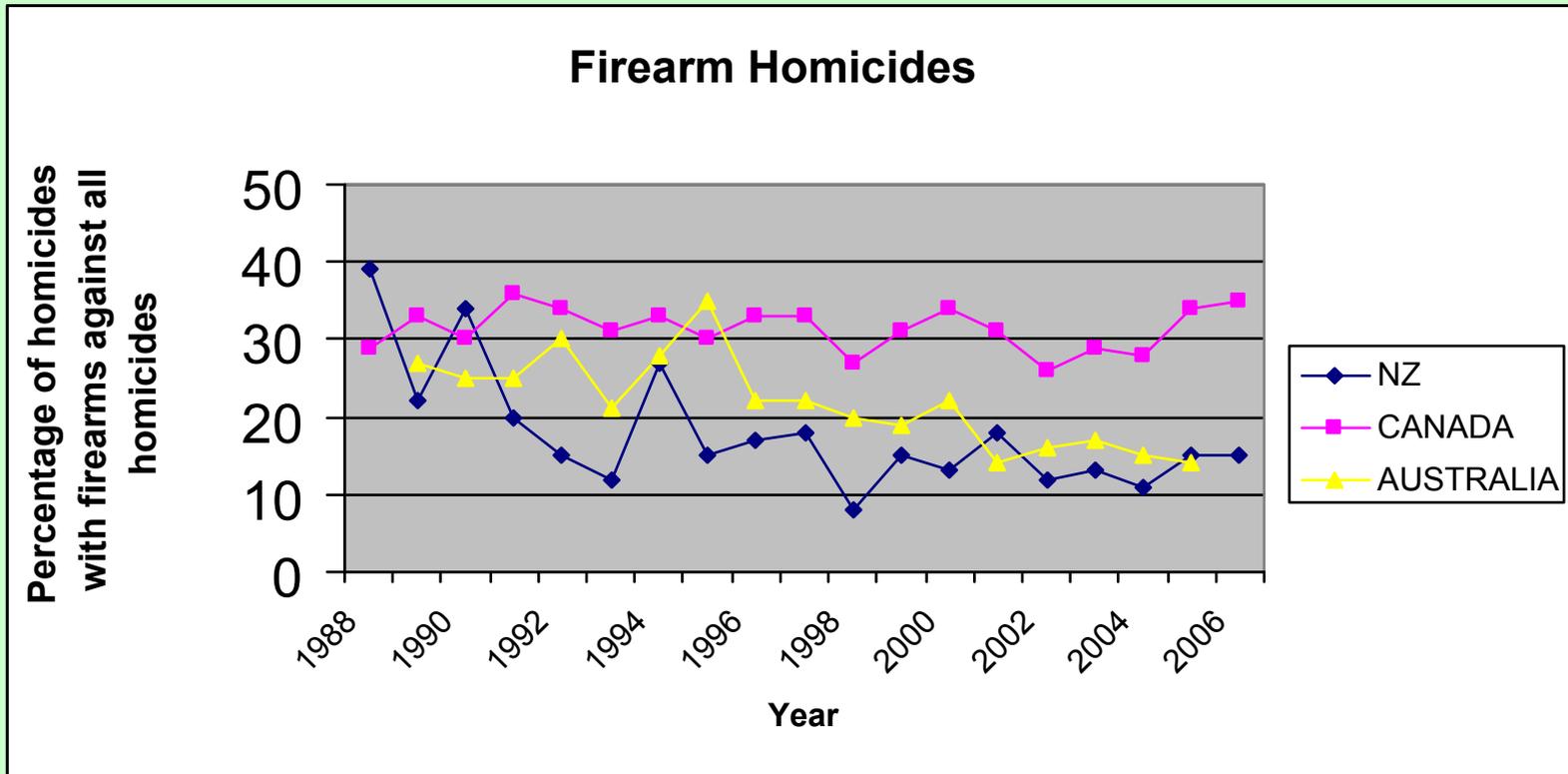
-- despite a variety of strategies



Homicide by firearm follows a downward trend

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Canada an exception



In New Zealand violent offending with firearms remains stable at about 1.3% of all violent offending



Summary

- *'The illegal use of firearms is a complex problem.*
- *There are some clear recommendations, such as greater efforts to tackle the availability and conversion of highly realistic imitation firearms.*
- *However most problems are more challenging and require social and economic rather than technical solutions'.*

(Home Office (2006, page 1). Findings 279: Gun Crime: the market in and use of illegal firearms)

Report of the Un Secretary General on Small Arms (18 April 2008)

- *‘The dividing lines between underdevelopment, instability, fragility, crises, conflict and war are becoming increasingly blurred’.*
- *‘It seems crucial to further understand the interplay between armed personal protection and armed power projection, and to focus on developing sustainable alternative livelihoods for those coping with disempowerment and despair’.*
- *‘The issue of small arms cannot be addressed with arms control measures only’*

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