



FIREARMS THEFT IN AUSTRALIA 2007-2017

Number of guns stolen per jurisdiction

New South Wales : 6651
Victoria: 6036
Queensland: 5474
Western Australia: 4502
South Australia: 1573
Tasmania: 2084
ACT: 158
NT: 175

New South Wales has the largest number of stolen firearms with a total of 6,651 stolen over ten years up to 30 June 2017.

In Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia the number of firearms stolen has more than doubled over 10 years with Victoria having the largest increase of 123 per cent.

Tasmania with only 2% of Australia's population accounts for 8% of gun thefts.

South Australia were unable to provide stolen firearms figures for a number of financial years. Therefore the total number is lower than what it should be.

The Northern Territory figures are an average due to difficulties accessing annual figures via FOI.

Number of firearms stolen in Australia over the past decade

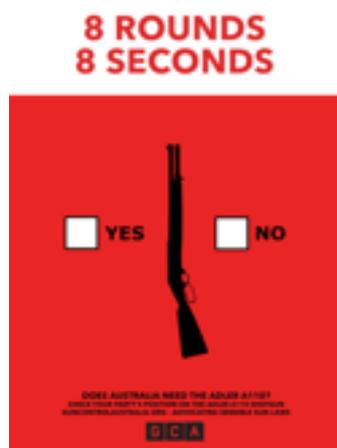
Gun Control Australia (GCA) has collated a decade of national stolen firearms statistics for the period 2007-08 to 2016-17. The figures show in the last ten years the average number of firearms stolen annually in Australia have nearly doubled increasing from just over 1,700 in 2007-08 to nearly 3,300 in 2016-17. Over the ten years, almost 27,000 firearms were stolen. From 2012-13 the average number of firearms stolen per year jumped to 3,200 from an average of 2,100 in the previous five years. The number of firearms stolen in 2016-17 were: NSW-761, Victoria-739, Queensland-720, Western Australia-694, South Australia-134, Tasmania-207, ACT-10 and NT-17.

The figures represent only a proportion of the total number of firearms stolen because the figures represent only those incidents that are reported to police. A number of gun owners may not report theft for various reasons: the firearm was not registered, they did not have a licence or the firearm was not stored properly and concerns about prosecution inhibit the person from reporting the theft.

Limited stolen firearms data

There is still no national database for obtaining stolen firearms figures, even though such a system is a resolution of the 1996 National Firearms Agreement. Due to this failing, the extent and type of stolen firearms data available varies from one jurisdiction to the next. Some jurisdictions are far better resourced and provide more in-depth data, while other jurisdictions are poorly resourced and the data is limited or very costly to obtain.

For these reasons, GCA was unable to obtain comprehensive data about location of theft and type of weapon stolen from all jurisdictions and for all years. The data obtained is able to provide a broad picture of the situation. GCA has drawn upon the Australian Institute of Criminology work into firearms theft.



Type of stolen firearms

Rifles made up the majority of reported stolen firearms. In NSW, rifles accounted for 52 per cent of firearms stolen over the ten year period. Followed by shotguns at 17 per cent and then double barrel shotguns and handguns.

A reason rifles account for such a large proportion of thefts could be because they are the most widely owned firearm. However another possibility could be that some owners of these types of firearms are not taking storage seriously. Such firearms are the lowest category of firearm in Australia, compared to the categories C and D which are the most restricted firearms.

A number of high-powered military style firearms were also stolen, but at much lower rates than other firearms. The reasons for this could be: these firearms are not as widely owned as hunting rifles, those who own these firearms take storage more seriously or the storage requirements are more stringent and there more difficult to steal. However, it only takes one high-powered firearms to be stolen and used for criminal purpose to cause a great deal of harm and grief.

Category of stolen firearms

Australia has a firearms classification system based on firing action, calibre, barrel length and other factors. There are five categories: A, B, C, D and H. Category A & B are the least restricted, while categories C & D are the most restricted including the higher powered firearms. Category H includes handguns, pistols and revolvers. Pistols being semi-automatics, legally available across Australia.

Category A and B continue to be the most common category of firearm stolen. Category A accounted for 60 per cent of thefts, while category B accounted for 30 per cent.

Category A and B firearms are the most common type of firearm owned in Australia and are mainly used for recreational hunting and clay target shooting.

GCA is concerned about advancements in the design and firing capability of hunting rifles and shotguns (category A and B firearms). The more modern hunting shotgun is no longer just a two or one shot firearm, but now includes a magazine and rapid-fire capability. An example is the Adler A110 six shot rapid-style firearm, which can include a magazine extension upgrading the firearm into an eight or 12 shot weapon in a matter of minutes. The Adler A110 six shot has been moved from a category A to a category B firearm.

Category A firearms include:

- * Air rifles.
- * Rimfire rifles (other than self-loading).
- * Shotguns (other than pump action or self-loading).
- * Shotgun/rimfire combinations.

Category B firearms include:

- * Muzzle-loading firearms (other than pistols).
- * Centre-fire rifles (other than self-loading).
- * Shotgun/centre-fire rifle combinations.
- * Lever action shotguns with a magazine capacity of no more than 5 rounds.

All restricted firearms are excluded from licence category A and B.



Location of theft

The majority of firearms were stolen from residential dwellings (around 75 per cent), followed by rural properties (around 18 per cent). Other places included business/commercial premises, vehicles, shed, garage, police stations and public places.

Firearm storage compliance

GCA is concerned there is a reasonably high number of owners who do not appropriately store their firearms and that some owners are not taking the securing of their firearms seriously, especially when it comes to hunting rifles (categories A and B).

State and Territory laws specify the required storage for the different firearm categories. But when applying for a firearm licence or an additional firearm the applicant only has to declare in writing that they meet the required storage regulation. There is no on the ground checking that such requirements have or are being met. Police can undertake random checks of storage, but with over 816,000 licence holders in Australia this is a significant resourcing issue.

GCA believes the current storage requirements need updating and reevaluating, and at the very least, it should be mandatory for firearms storage receptacles to be fitted with an alarm system or surveillance cameras. GCA also wants to see increased auditing of firearm storage and better ways to track stolen firearms.

The impact of weakening gun laws on gun theft

Last year, GCA released an independent report about the state of Australia's gun laws. The report reveals that no state or territory jurisdiction complies with the 1996 National Firearms Agreement. Click here for copy of report: <https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2017/10/05/australia-slipping-backwards-on-national-firearms-agreement.html>

Due to decades of pressure from the gun lobby, politicians have allowed gun laws to be weakened. As a result, the majority of jurisdictions have removed background checks for obtaining additional hunting rifles and allow gun owners to accumulate large numbers of these weapons without any verification of genuine need or reason.

The undermining of our guns laws by the gun lobby, means that in most jurisdictions there are licensed gun owners with more than 50 guns each. These are not collectors or dealers. In New South Wales there is an individual licence holder (not a collector or dealer) who legally owns 312 firearms. The NSW Greens 'Too Many Guns' website allows the public to view the number of guns in their suburb in NSW: <http://www.toomanyguns.org>

Last year, New South Wales watered down its gun storage laws by allowing police to issue a penalty notice for failure to properly store a firearm. Before this amendment, a person was required to front up to court to explain why a loaded firearm had been left on the kitchen table. The amendment sends a very bad message to gun owners - storage requirements of firearms are not important.

A need for a national organisation to monitor, research and track gun theft in Australia.

On 1 July 2006, as part of a recommendation by the Australian Police Ministers' Council Firearms Working Group, the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) was funded to establish the National Firearms Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP). This program produced invaluable public reports about the theft of firearms across Australia. The reports provided in depth analysis of firearm theft and assisted in providing a long term picture about the ways in which firearms are stolen, why they are stolen and possible ways to prevent theft in the future.

In 2010, the then Commonwealth Government established the Firearms Advisory Council comprised only of gun lobby representatives. The following year the funding for the NFTMP was stopped and has never been reinstated. It is unclear as to why this funding was discontinued, especially as the Police Ministers' Council recommend the originally funding for the NFTMP.

We can learn from strategies employed by the National Rifle Association (NRA) in the United States. In 1996, the NRA managed to convince Congress to pass an amendment to a spending bill that prohibited the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention from using funds to research gun violence in America. The push came after public health researchers produced a number of studies suggesting that having a gun in the home increased risk of homicide and suicide.

With Australia not having a national database system that is jurisdictionally linked, and not having a body researching gun violence or gun theft, we will lack a clear picture or understanding of how to prevent gun violence or gun theft. No data, means no problem.

What needs to be done to fix the problem?

GCA is calling for the following action:

- The Prime Minister to hold a special meeting of State and Territory leaders to address outdated storage requirements, address the lack of monitoring and tracking of firearms theft in Australia and tackle the failure of the States and Territories to comply with the National Firearms Agreement.
- State and Territories to place a limit on the number of firearms that can be owned at any given time to 4-5 guns per licence holder (exceptions for collectors and dealers).
- The Federal government to reinstate funding to the Australian Institute of Criminology in order for AIC to recommence the National Firearms Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP).

Table: Number of stolen firearms by jurisdiction and financial years

N/A means figures not available

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
NSW	410	592	446	700	794	717	726	743	762	761
Vic	332	343	363	426	763	799	701	747	823	739
Qld	352	371	461	552	518	579	591	620	710	720
WA	323	328	289	318	381	477	429	899	364	694
SA	193	211	N/A	N/A	N/A	253	246	262	274	134
Tas	109	121	216	249	189	245	231	257	260	207
ACT	9	22	15	3	68	5	8	8	10	10
NT	12	25	17	17	17	17	12	18	23	17
Total	1740	2013	1807	2265	2730	3092	2944	3554	3226	3282