



Issues Paper: Government grants allocated to gun clubs and shooting complexes

Introduction

Gun Control Australia (GCA) has collated figures for a five-year period (2014/15 to 2018/2019) showing the amount of funds provided via government grant schemes to gun clubs and shooting complexes across Australia.

The grant schemes are administered by various government bodies in each jurisdiction including:

- Department of Premier and Cabinet (Tasmania)
- Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (WA)
- Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (SA)
- Queensland Government
- Sport and Recreation Victoria
- Office of Sport NSW
- Sport Australia (Cth)

The figures were collated from: State Budget Papers, Annual Reports and government media releases. Jurisdictions have different funding grant schemes which are administered at different times of the year, so care needs to be taken when comparing jurisdictions. The figures provide a snap shot of the funds allocated by each jurisdiction over a period of time.

Key points:

- For the period 2014/15 to 2018/2019 a minimum of **\$77,467,237** was allocated to improve gun clubs and build or improve shooting complexes through the various state and commonwealth grant schemes.
- Queensland allocated \$16,500,000 to upgrading shooting complexes - the most of any jurisdiction - followed closely by New South Wales who allocated \$15,043,000.¹
- The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) received a large piece of the funding pie, receiving over \$1,692,000 for its various gun clubs across Australia.
- Although the rate of participation in shooting sports is declining, the level of government funds to the sport remains high.
- New South Wales and Victoria established specific grant schemes just for shooting sports. The New South Wales scheme is the oldest and has been operating since 1998. The New South Wales scheme has allocated over \$25 million dollars since its inception.²

¹ NSW Government 2017-2018, Local Sport Grant Program Recipients, Office of Sport Annual Reports 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18.

² <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/government-accused-of-spending-big-to-keep-nsw-shooters-on-side-20171022-gz5sqy.html>

Total funds granted

For the period 2014/15 to 2018/2019, **\$77,467,237** was allocated to gun clubs and shooting complexes through the various state and commonwealth grant schemes. Of these funds, around \$41 million had been granted to building shooting complexes in the various jurisdictions.

In total, Queensland granted the most funds to building and improving shooting complexes and gun clubs, followed by New South Wales, Victoria and the Commonwealth.

Table: Funds provided to gun clubs and shooting complexes via government grants schemes for 2014/2015 to 2018/19

| Jurisdiction | Amount |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Queensland | \$18,961,162 |
| New South Wales | \$18,372,262 |
| Victoria | \$16,800,000 |
| Commonwealth | \$13,344,200 |
| Western Australia | \$9,305,378 |
| South Australia | \$541,556 |
| Tasmania | \$142,679 |
| Total | \$77,467,237 |

(*There were no figures available for Northern Territory and minimal publicly available for ACT)

Shooting complexes

The Queensland government allocated the most amount of funds to shooting complex construction - \$16,500,000. These funds were spent on improving/expanding the Belmont Shooting Complex in Brisbane for the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Recently, the Queensland government has come under scrutiny over its plans to support an expansion of the Belmont Shooting Complex range which would clear five hectares of Brisbane koala habitat.³

New South Wales allocated \$15,043,000 to improving shooting complexes over the same period.⁴ Western Australia also allocated just over \$9 million to building and improving shooting complexes.⁵

³ Brisbane Times, February 20, 2019, 'Queensland government under fire over proposed rifle range expansion' by Tony Moore: <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/environment/conservation/queensland-government-under-fire-over-proposed-rifle-range-expansion-20190219-p50ywb.html>

⁴ NSW Government 2017-2018, Local Sport Grant Program Recipients, Office of Sport Annual Reports 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18.

⁵ Department of Sport and Recreation Annual Report 2015/2016 and 2014/2015 and <https://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/news-and-events/news/news-articles/2016/02/23/first-shots-fired-at-new-shooting-range>

Commonwealth grants

The Commonwealth grant scheme is administered by Sport Aus a Commonwealth entity within the Australia's Department of Health Portfolio. This body has directed its grants to the peak target shooting organisation - Shooting Australia (also known as Australian International Shooting Ltd). For the period 2014-15 to 2017-18, Shooting Australia received over \$13,344,200 in grant funds. In a two-year period, from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018, the funds to from the Commonwealth to Shooting Australia increased by \$754,250.

Shooting Australia is the nation's peak body for target shooting sports. One of its Board members is Clive Pugh who is the Director of Winchester Australia and the gun industry lobby group Shooting Industry Foundation of Australia (SIFA).

Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) and grants recipients

For the period 2014/15 to 2018/2019, various grants were allocated to the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA). The SSAA received over \$1,692,000 for improvement to gun clubs. This figure may be an underestimation of grants allocated to the SSAA, because the Victorian Government does not publish a break-down of grant recipients in the Shooting Sports Facilities Program.⁶

But in the SSAA Victoria 2017/2018 Annual Report it states the organisation received \$502,942 (2018) and \$751,000 (2017) in government grants. These government grants are for a range of SSAA projects, including for the Shooting Sports Facilities Program⁷.

The SSAA is the largest and oldest gun advocate and sports shooting body in Australia. The organisation's website lists the National Rifle Association (NRA) as one of its affiliations and close relationships. It has offices in each state and territory as well as a national office. The Association also has 400 SSAA shooting clubs with a national membership of 180,000 gun owners.⁸

In 1996, when Australia's gun laws were amended following the Port Arthur massacre the new laws required firearm licence applicants to join a gun club in order to meet a 'genuine reason' criteria for seeking a gun licence. With a large number of gun clubs being owned by the SSAA this meant the Association was able to capture the majority of club membership and club membership fees.

According to research by Philip Alpers from the Sydney School of Public Health at Sydney University, the SSAA is now the wealthiest sports shooting body in Australia. The top seven SSAA branches declare income of \$20 million and net assets of \$34 million. The national SSAA branch collects \$10 million in annual fees. Alpers states, *"That's more than double the assets of Swimming Australia, and nine-tenths the income of Athletics Australia. In its most recent publicly available financial return, SSAA National in Adelaide reported an accumulated war chest of \$6 million in cash."*

⁶ The Victorian allocation of grants figures to the SSAA has been collated from SSAA media releases and annual reports.

⁷ Sporting Shooters' Association of Victoria, Annual Report 2017/2018, pg 12.

⁸ Philip Alpers, 4 December 2016, 'Australian gun laws may seed their own destruction: Laws are providing a multi-million income stream for Australia's pro gun lobby', GunPolicy.org.

In 2017/2018, SSAA Victoria's operating surplus was \$1.8m, a \$665,000 increase on the previous financial year. The Association also reported \$6.92m revenue for the year ending April 2018, which was a \$1.36m (or 24 per cent) increase on the previous year.

In 2015, SSAA (VIC) reported \$4.4 million in revenue and assets of \$5 million. Adjusted for inflation, branch assets have increased 559% in value since the 1996 gun laws. SSAA (NSW) reported income of \$2.4 million with assets of \$7.2 million (up 717%), while SSAA (QLD) collected income of \$5 million and holds assets of \$15.7 million, of which \$8.3 million are in cash.⁹

Participation in shooting sports

Although the participation rate in shooting sports is declining in Australia, the level of government funds remains high. For example, in a two-year period from 2016/17 to 2017/18 the New South Wales government granted over \$13,743,00 dollars to building/renovating shooting complexes by directing funds through the Office of Sport NSW's 'Improving Sporting Facilities Grants'. For the period 2016-17 to 2017-2018, Queensland spent \$16.5 million on the Belmont Shooting Centre.

A recent report prepared by the The Australia Institute (TAI) and commissioned by Gun Control Australia found that the share of the population participating in shooting sports has more the halved falling from 0.7% to 0.3% between 1995-96 and 2013-14.¹⁰ The report also found the number of licensed gun owners has fallen by a third, which corresponds to a more that 40% decrease in gun owners as a share of the population. The report noted that shooting sports has been in decline for at least the past two decades, with a fall of 40% in the number of participants.

Specific grant schemes for shooting

New South Wales and Victoria have specific grant schemes dedicated just for shooting sports.

New South Wales Grants Schemes

In 1997 the then Legislative Council representative and Shooter Party founder, John Tingle, set up the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Shooting Clubs (MACOSC) that included the Police, Sport, Land and Environment Minister and two other Ministers. The aim of the Committee was to develop a whole of government approach to issues associated with shooting clubs in New South Wales.

The New South Wales 'Safe Shooting' grants scheme was set up by MACOSC along with the 'Shooting Facilities Development Program'.¹¹

The Office of Sport administers the 'Safe Shooting Program' on behalf of the Office of Police, Department of Justice. Since 2010 the 'Safe Shooting' grants scheme has granted \$600,000 each year to gun clubs across the state. In 2009/10 the grants scheme distributed \$815,000 in funds to gun clubs via the 'Safe Shooting' scheme. In addition, the 'Shooting Facilities Development Program' has granted millions in funds to shooting complexes since its establishment in 1998/99.¹²

⁹ Ibid at 7

¹⁰ Bill Browne, March 2019, 'Hunters and Collectors: Gun use and ownership in Australia, The Australia Institute.

¹¹ https://sport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/annual_report_2002_2003.PDF

¹² NSW Department of Sport and Recreation, Annual Report 2002/2003: https://sport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/annual_report_2002_2003.PDF

Victoria Grants Scheme

In 2014 the Victorian Government established the Shooting Sports Facilities Program to provide funding support for projects that improve the quality and sustainability of shooting sport facilities and activities across Victoria. The Program is administered by Sport and Recreation Victoria and has provided nearly \$17 million in grants.

In 2015 the Labor Government appointed former Minister for Agriculture, Joe Helper, to chair the Shooting Sports Facilities Program Advisory Committee as well as Russell Bate (Firearms Safety Foundation of Victoria), Russell Pearson (consultant for Beretta Australia), Clive Whelan (served as Vice President of Pistol Australia and visited NRA headquarters in 1989)¹³ and Marion Barnes (now SSAA Victoria Board of Directors).

¹³ <https://www.ssusa.org/articles/2018/12/21/longtime-bianchi-cup-protest-chairman-clive-whelan-passes-away/>