

MEDIA STATEMENT: As Gun Reform Advances, Tasmania Must Not Overlook Family Violence

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Australia's parliament has just passed the most significant changes to gun laws since the 1996 Port Arthur massacre. The reforms establish a national firearms buy-back, abolish open-ended import permits, and introduce more rigorous background checks with improved information sharing between governments and security agencies.

The timing is stark. At the time of writing this statement police continue to search for a gunman after the tragic shooting of three people including sadly two Aboriginal women. Authorities are currently treating the situation 'as a domestic violence-related incident', with the alleged perpetrator already known to police for apprehended domestic violence issues.

Why Family Violence Must Be Part of Gun Reform

While mass casualty events drive legislative gun reform, family violence represents a significant but overlooked dimension of firearms risk. The presence of firearms in domestic and family violence situations substantially increases the likelihood of lethal outcomes. Alongside such devastating but preventable fatalities, firearms are used as instruments of coercive control, used to threaten and intimidate women and children in abusive relationships.

This dynamic is particularly acute in rural and remote Tasmania. Women and children experiencing family violence in these communities face compounded challenges: isolation on rural properties, longer police response times, greater distance from support services, higher rates of firearm ownership, and community dynamics where reporting abuse can feel unsafe.

"Firearms are powerful tools of coercive control, through intimidation and threats to suicide or homicide." Said a Tasmanian Family Violence Service Provider, "Children are uniquely endangered by firearms in family violence settings. Not only is there increased accidental injury risk, but children often witness weapon-based threats and suffer the psychological impact including trauma."

Public data on weapons in family violence incidents captures only a fraction of reality. Women threatened with firearms rarely report these incidents due to fear of escalation, lack of accessible support, concerns about being believed, or because there is no safe way out. This means the true scale of firearms-enabled family violence remains invisible in policy discussions - yet devastatingly real for those experiencing it.

What We Want to See

Tasmania was the tragic and unwilling catalyst for Australia's world-leading gun reforms. The Port Arthur massacre changed this nation forever. Now, as national reforms roll out, Tasmania has an opportunity to lead, this time by ensuring gun reform explicitly protects those experiencing family violence.

“As debate emerges about the costs of implementing these reforms, we must be clear - the cost of inaction is measured in lives and livelihoods lost.” Said Ms Bree Klerck, CEO of the Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance. “ When we consider what these reforms cost to implement, we must also consider what failure to act costs our community - in preventable deaths, in trauma, in lives lived under threat. Safety must be the priority.”

As Tasmania implements these national gun reforms, we call on the government to ensure family violence considerations are embedded in decision-making on gun regulation. This is about recognising that gun safety means protecting Tasmanians not only from mass casualty events, but from the coercion and terror occurring behind closed doors and experienced every day in Tasmanian homes.

“True gun reform keeps people safe from both fatalities and fear,” said Ms Klerck. “We urge the Tasmanian Parliament to ensure these reforms are implemented with prevention of family violence as a core focus. The Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance, its members and victim-survivors are ready to support government in this work”.

End Statement

For further comment or information, contact:

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About the Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance:

The Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance (TFSVA) is the peak body for family violence and sexual violence including child sexual abuse. We represent the sector across the continuum of primary prevention, early intervention, response and healing and recovery. We amplify the voices of lived experience and practice knowledge to improve the family and sexual violence system, influence policy, and drive cultural change to end gendered violence.

Media guidelines:

The following media guidelines have been developed to support safe, respectful and accurate reporting on family and sexual violence:

Our Watch - Guidelines for reporting on violence against women

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/media-reporting/resources/guidelines-for-reporting>

Supports and services in Tasmania:

When sharing information about family and sexual violence in Tasmania, we encourage the inclusion of the following services:

- If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call Triple Zero (000)
- Family Violence Counselling and Support Service (FVCSS) 1800 608 122
- For 24-hour sexual assault support call 1800 697 877 (1800 MY SUPPORT)
- If you are worried about your behaviour, please call the MENS program on 1300 364 27