

One gun can be enough to keep a family living in fear

Tasmania's peak body for family and sexual violence is urging Parliament to look beyond the face value of the Firearms Amendment Bill and consider the evidence and data that should drive public safety.

The Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance (TFSVA) supports stronger firearms regulation, including measures to reduce the number of firearms in the community and improve oversight of who has access to them.

But TFSVA CEO Bree Klerck said the current debate and tabled Bill overlooks a critical reality: in the wrong household, one firearm can be enough to create an environment of fear and control.

"Through a family violence lens, the question cannot only be whether someone has one firearm, five or fifty. One firearm is enough to make a family aware that leaving, resisting or reporting that violence could cost their lives," Ms Klerck said.

"A firearm does not have to be pointed at someone or discharged to be used as a weapon in coercive control."

[TFSVA's submission on the Firearms Amendment Bill](#) highlights Tasmanian victim-survivor experiences and research showing how firearms can be used as tools of coercive control, intimidation and psychological abuse, influencing whether victim-survivors feel safe to seek help or leave.

Ms Klerck said this was particularly important in Tasmania, with more than 152,000 registered firearms and almost 38,000 individual firearms licence holders, alongside some of Australia's highest rates of intimate partner violence, emotional and economic abuse and stalking.

"We are not suggesting that lawful firearm ownership causes family violence," Ms Klerck said.

"But good public policy must recognise when known risks intersect. Tasmania has high firearm ownership, high rates of violence against women and children, a dispersed population and significant gaps in access to specialist family and sexual violence services.

"That combination deserves careful consideration when Parliament decides what a safe firearms framework should look like."

Rural and remote victim-survivors face additional risks

The Manager of Huon Valley Domestic Violence Service says the issue is particularly significant in rural and remote communities, where firearms are commonly and legitimately used, but geographic isolation, longer police response times, limited transport and fewer specialist services create additional barriers to safety.

"For someone living on a remote property, calling police is not always a simple or safe option," the Huon Manager said.

“We need to consider the impacts and a person’s capacity to seek help in the presence of a firearm in a rurally isolated property.”

TFSVA says firearms policy cannot rely solely on whether someone has been convicted of an offence, is subject to a Family Violence Order, or even whose name appears on a firearms licence.

The Alliance’s submission includes the experiences of two Tasmanian victim-survivors that demonstrate how firearm-related coercive control can remain largely invisible to existing systems.

“Allison” lived on an isolated rural property where her partner was a licensed firearm owner. No direct threat was ever made with the firearms, but Allison described their presence as a constant reminder of her partner’s capacity to use lethal force. The firearms reinforced the coercive control she was already experiencing and influenced her day-to-day decisions.

In another case, “Cassie” was coerced into obtaining a firearms licence and registering firearms in her own name because her abusive partner, who had previously been subject to a Family Violence Order interstate, could not obtain a licence himself. Despite Cassie being the legal licence holder, her partner assumed control of the firearms.

“These experiences show how easily firearm-related risk can sit beneath the surface,” Ms Klerck said.

“That is why our firearms laws need to understand coercive control and look beyond what appears on paper when assessing risk.”

Parliament has an opportunity to strengthen safety

TFSVA is asking Parliament to ensure family violence and coercive control are treated as core public safety considerations as the Firearms Amendment Bill is debated.

This should include stronger consideration of family violence risk in determining whether someone is a fit and proper person to hold a firearms licence; mandatory licence reviews when family violence risk is identified; and stronger information sharing between Firearms Services, Tasmania Police Family Violence Units and Safe at Home.

“The issue is not responsible firearm ownership. The issue is ensuring that people who use family violence, coercive control, threats or intimidation are identified before they are given - or allowed to retain - access to firearms,” Ms Klerck said.

“Caps are part of the conversation. But Parliament must also ask: how do we make sure access to a firearm does not become another tool that enables a person using violence to keep their family trapped and afraid?

“Our firearms licensing system must be designed to screen for violence and risk, not simply respond after harm has occurred. Where there are indicators of family violence or coercive control, that must trigger proper scrutiny of whether a person remains fit and proper to possess a firearm.”

ENDS