



PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH PREMIERS AND CHIEF MINISTERS

In light of the recent tragic events in Bali and at Monash University in Melbourne, counter-terrorism and gun control dominated our discussions.

Counter-terrorism prevention and response is a responsibility shared between the Commonwealth, States and Territories. I am therefore pleased that, at today's meeting, the Premiers and Chief Ministers joined with me to formalise a new Inter-Governmental Agreement on Australia's National Counter-Terrorism Arrangements. The Agreement provides a new and strong framework for cooperation between jurisdictions.

Following the signing of the Agreement, the Premiers and Chief Ministers were briefed by the Directors-General of ASIO and the Office of National Assessments, the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police about our current security environment and issues flowing from the Bali attacks.

We agreed that at its inaugural meeting, the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, established pursuant to the Intergovernmental Agreement signed today, the Committee prepare a report for COAG in relation to any additional measures they consider appropriate concerning upgrading security.

Hand gun control is another example of how responsibility for a serious public safety issue is shared between the Commonwealth, States and Territories. After Port Arthur we achieved great success in controlling military-style weapons. We need to build on that success and other recent measures to control handguns in light of the tragic events in Melbourne this week.

Public safety is the overriding objective, but the government is also mindful of the legitimate aspirations of genuine sporting shooters and will work with their representatives to ensure participation in legitimate sporting events is not

compromised. However weapons that are not used in events such as the Olympic and Commonwealth Games and other key events should not be publicly available and their retention cannot be justified.

The registration of firearms is a state responsibility. The Commonwealth has substantially increased resources to Customs who are responsible for scrutinising cargo to detect illegally imported firearms. We have urged the States and Territories to increase penalties for illegal possession of weapons. Hand gun trafficking is the subject of joint state and federal police operations. Investigating hand gun trafficking will be a priority for the Australian Crime Commission when it is established in January.

I made a very public commitment to gun reform after the Port Arthur tragedy. Today I reaffirmed that commitment at my meeting with Premiers and Chief Ministers. The government is determined to take all possible steps to further tighten our gun controls. I am determined to see that it happens.

Police Ministers are meeting next month. It was agreed with Premiers and Chief Ministers that the attached Commonwealth proposals be referred to Police Ministers for consideration. Police Ministers have also been asked to consider any proposals submitted by States and Territories and to prepare a report for the the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting on 29th November 2002.

24 October 2002

Handguns – key measures

The Minister for Justice and Customs and Police Ministers will be asked to work on proposals to tighten controls on handguns in the community.

Recognising the importance of seeking the advice of responsible sporting shooters, I have asked the Minister for Justice and Customs to establish a Sporting Shooters Advisory Council to advise on handguns required for accredited sporting competition and arrangements for the safe usage and handling of guns.

In developing these proposals I want to ensure that we take account of necessary differences that might be required to meet the particular needs of rural and regional communities.

The proposals that I want to see developed for a report to be considered by COAG on 29th November 2002 include:

1. Restricting classes of legal handguns to those meeting sporting shooter classifications for the Commonwealth and Olympic Games and similar events or destined for Police, security or military uses. All other classes of handguns will be banned nationwide. Advice as to the appropriate classifications will be provided by organisations representing sporting shooters through the advisory council.
2. A buy-back or compensation scheme and amnesty for those in possession of illegal weapons under which they can be handed in. The cost of the buy-back scheme will be met jointly by the Commonwealth and the States and Territories.
3. Accelerating uniform national standards for registering and tracking weapons.
4. Tightening controls on the issue of firearms licences, ensuring checks on licensees are meaningful and current, cross checking the number and type of weapons held by individual licensees.
5. Mandatory reporting by health professionals to police of persons who disclose ownership of firearms and are unfit to possess them, with an associated education programme to alert health professionals to their responsibility.

6. Limiting the number and type of weapons that can be held by individuals and in particular inexperienced shooters. A system involving a probationary licence including restrictions on the type and calibre of firearms available to probationary licence holders might be required.

7. Limiting the number of clubs that people can join, and requiring club permission to be given before a member can gain access to a firearm. In conjunction with this examine minimum attendance and participation requirements for club members.

8. An examination of options for requiring clubs to provide firearms registries with annual written reports on new members and other relevant information. In addition examine authorising registries to supply handgun details on club members.

9. Ensuring that when sporting clubs move to expel members as being unfit they are supported by appropriate legislative backing.

10. An examination of options for tightening controls in relation to the storage of weapons, and further controlling access to ammunition (noting there may need to be different requirements of metropolitan and rural areas).

11. An urgent review of the arrangements whereby firearms are allocated to the employees of security firms.

12. Increase and make consistent, penalties for the illegal possession of weapons.

13. Police services are already jointly working on hand gun trafficking but more effort is required – noting that investigating handgun trafficking will be a priority for the Australian Crime Commission when it is established in January.

Police Ministers will be meeting on 5th and 6th November 2002.