

# THE HOWARD LIBRARY

## LESSON 2: NATIONAL FIREARMS AGREEMENT

### SOURCE COLLECTION

#### SOURCE A

Media coverage of the massacre was detailed and dramatic. The Hobart Mercury's front page had a large photo and the heading 'This is the Man.' Melbourne's Age ran with 'Australia's worst-ever mass shooting.' Brisbane's Courier Mail went even further, reporting that the Port Arthur incident 'is believed to be the world's worst massacre by a lone gunman...and probably the worst civilian shooting massacre by a lone gunman in history.'

Some 700 journalists and news presenters descended on Port Arthur and Hobart, wanting briefings from police and medical staff, hoping for interviews with injured victims and eye witnesses. Legislators were now under intense pressure to prevent another mass shooting. Aside from the fury directed at the accused [...] reporters and commentators were claiming that inadequate firearm regulations had contributed to the tragedy and that efforts to change the law could no longer be resisted.

Claiming to speak on behalf of the people, the press blamed the easy availability of semi-automatic firearms and concluded that a raft of reforms must be brought in, including prohibiting such firearms.

*Tom Frame AM. Gun Control: What Australia Got Right (And Wrong) UNSW Press, Sydney, 2019.*



#### SOURCE B

*Memorial service for staff, friends, and relatives. 13 April 1997.*

*Source: News Ltd. Photographer: Mike Keating.*

## SOURCE C

Last night I saw on national television Mr Ted Drane, the National President of the shooters' organisations in Australia, and he said something with which I totally agree. He said that he and his fellow shooters were not criminals, they were Australians. And I want to start my address to you today by saying at no stage in the weeks that have gone by [...] have I sought to describe [...] people who enjoy shooting as being in anyway criminal or un-Australian.

[...] We believe that it is in the national interest that there be a dramatic reduction in the number of automatic and semi-automatic weapons in the Australian community. [...] I am mindful that people who have never owned a weapon, have never had any desire to own a weapon, are not going to be affected in the way in which people such as you are being affected. I know that, I regret that [...] but it cannot alter the responsibility of a national Government to take a decision that it believes serves the greater good of the entire Australian community.

[...] We have not sought in taking this decision to brand any of you people as being anti-social. We have not sought [...] to brand people who enjoy shooting as being engaged in any kind of criminal activity [...] You will find nothing that I have said, and you will find nothing that I will say in the future, that will in any way take that attitude.

***Prime Minister John Howard, speaking at a 1996 rally in Sales, Victoria. Source: PM transcripts***



## SOURCE D

***Prime Minister John Howard, at the 1996 rally in Sales, delivering the speech quoted from in Source C. Before the rally, he had been informed by police of a death threat against him.***

12 Richmond St  
Earlwood. 2206  
16-6-96

The Prime Minister of Australia  
John Howard, MHR.



Dear Sir,

I congratulate you on your stand against gun proliferation in Australia.

As difficult as it is, I believe that it is Australia's last chance to get it right. One person's ownership of a gun means that another person needs to get one for security, even if they have no interest in owning one.

I believe you were wise to wear a bullet proof jacket and would be wise to wear one on other occasions.

I realise that guns are genuinely needed by some people and that as long as these are registered and a hefty fee is attached to the registration, these guns will be kept to a minimum, not the maximum.

Every car owner has to register their cars etc and if you own more than one, then you pay full price for each vehicle.

If I were you I wouldn't try to talk gun owners around but quickly introduce workable legislation that is fair to legitimate gun owners.

'Rabble gun owners' don't want to talk. Please encourage speedy legislation! They'll soon get used to the idea.

P.T.O.

If this legislation is hard now  
it will be totally impossible in the  
future to implement.

PLEASE PLEASE let's not follow  
the U.S. let's follow Canada and  
also be ourselves and follow  
our good instincts about this issue.

Please note that I did not  
vote for you or your party but I am  
delighted with your choices in this  
matter. Please continue to fight.

Yours faithfully,

(Mrs) Jan Dundas.

P.S. Don't bother to apologise to  
gun owners about the legislation.  
Just say "C'est la vie,  
I'm doing you a favour!"

#### SOURCE E (ABOVE)

A 1996 letter to Prime Minister Howard from a member of the public, offering him encouragement in his attempts to strengthen firearms laws after the Port Arthur Massacre. Source: Australian National Archives.



**SOURCE F**

*Two protesters at a March for Our Lives rally in Minnesota, USA, on March 24, 2018.  
Photographer: Fibonacci Blue*