

## The Origin of Australian Crime Guns

Statements from those involved in curbing  
the proliferation of illicit firearms

According to Australian border detection figures and the National Firearms Trace Program (FTP), illegal importation accounts for a comparatively small percentage of illicit firearms in the Australia market. Of all firearms traced by the FTP in 2015–16, only 1 per cent were identified as illegally imported... Where a diversion method could be identified, between 2004 and 30 June 2016 most handguns were diverted through: Theft (30.9 per cent); Deactivation/legislative loopholes (18.5 per cent); Other (16.2 per cent). ['Other' includes illegal importation].

Illicit Firearms in Australia: Analysis of Firearms Trace Data  
Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, 21 October 2016

Gary Fleetwood, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission national firearm trace program expert, said... "When people ask me where these guns are coming from, I say: 'They were already here.'"

As Many As 600,000 Illegal Guns in Australia. *The Age*, 21 October 2016

Senator McKenzie's claim that most guns used to commit a crime are illegally imported rather than coming from licensed gun owners can't be verified by data. The Senate inquiry report she herself signed emphasises the uncertainty of the number and sources of illegal guns. Her claim is baseless.

Where do Australians Get Illegal Guns? *ABC Fact Check*, 26 May 2015

"The Australian Crime Commission, in 2011, looked at sources of illegal firearms in Australia, so they're pretty expert people. And they said around one per cent come over the borders -- that is, they're imported. Forty-four per cent are out there in the hands of criminals because they're guns that should've been given back at the time of the buyback, after Port Arthur and the guns changed (sic.). But people didn't give them back. Around twelve per cent are stolen, so started off as legitimate firearms with someone who was entitled to have them, and then they got stolen and into the hands of criminals. So, one per cent coming across the borders... it's one per cent of the illegal firearms problem."

Gillard, Julia. Prime Minister of Australia  
2UE Sydney, 18 January 2013

The large domestic black market consisted of at least 10,000 illegal handguns, many in circulation for decades and sometimes much longer... this black market comprised thousands of stolen firearms, others sourced from dishonest dealers, some not surrendered or registered under national firearms buybacks plus others either manufactured or reactivated by backyard operators. Mr Lawler said criminals also sought to import firearms, usually on an ad hoc and opportunistic basis.

Lawler, John. Chief Executive, Australian Crime Commission  
'Government Launches New Gun Intelligence Unit'  
*The Australian*, 12 April 2012

Many, if not the majority of, firearms in both the grey and illicit markets were most likely legally imported into Australia prior to the firearm and related reforms [of the late 1990s].

Bricknell, Samantha. *Firearm Trafficking and Serious and Organised Crime Gangs*. Australian Institute of Criminology, June 2012

"Most of those weapons seized are actually stolen from legitimate sources. So they may be legitimately owned by someone and stored at home or stored in a weapons store of some sort or some company that has legitimate uses for them and then they're diverted into criminal activity."

Kaldas, NSW Police Commissioner Nick  
'Nick Kaldas Discusses Recent Shootings'  
*ABC 7.30 Report*, 12 January 2012

"The majority of firearms that end up with criminals and criminal gangs are stolen from arms dealers or from places like security organisations during cash-in-transit robberies."

Finch, Det. Supt Ken, Commander, NSW Police Firearm Squad  
'Crims Gun-Running the Gauntlet on Ports'  
*Daily Telegraph*, 14 September 2011

Firearms are diverted to the illicit market through theft, including staged robberies, rogue firearm dealers and the reactivation of firearms that have been listed as deactivated. The more significant avenues of diversion were as a result of theft and 'leakage' from firearms dealers into the black market.

'Frequently Asked Media Questions: Illicit Firearms' ([Web page](#))  
Australian Crime Commission, 8 August 2011, accessed May 2012

Illicit long-arms, such as rifles and shotguns, are principally sourced from the pool of unregistered firearms which remain in the possession of persons who failed to register them in 1996 as required under the National Firearms Agreement. Illicit handguns have principally been sourced by criminals who took advantage of differences in state and territory definitions of firearms and other loopholes which have been closed by authorities for over a decade.

'What Are Illicit Firearms? - Origin of Illegal Guns' ([Web page](#))  
Australian Crime Commission, 1 April 2011, accessed May 2012

There is no evidence or intelligence to suggest that large volumes of firearms are being illegally imported into Australia. The Australian Crime Commission's (ACC) Illicit Firearm Markets Special Intelligence Operation in 2009 did not find extensive evidence of the illegal importation of firearms.

'Importation of Guns.' Media Statement, Australian  
Customs Service, 14 September 2011

"The major source of the [illegal gun] problem has been the theft from homes of licensed firearm holders, where these people have their guns kept in a safe at home. The house is broken into and the safe is entered and their contents are stolen."

Kerlatec, Det Supt John, Commander, NSW Police Firearm Squad  
'Melbourne Shooting Prompts Calls for Illegal Gun Crackdown'  
*ABC News 7.30 Report*, 4 July 2007

[M]ost illegal firearms are brought into the illicit stream in Queensland through diversion. These numbers are boosted by opportunistic thefts. In the main, the illicit firearms market is composed of people who have legitimate access to firearms and use this legitimacy to cloak small-scale irregular firearm diversions.

Organised Crime Markets in Queensland: A strategic assessment.  
*Intelligence Digest, Crime Bulletin No. 6*. Queensland Crime and  
Misconduct Commission. October 2003, p. 8.

Federal Justice Minister Senator Chris Ellison says the rise in gun-related crime is more related to the theft of legal guns rather than border control issues. Senator Ellison ... says the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) has been focusing on stolen domestic guns. "Really the issue is the theft of guns," he said. "The Institute of Criminology has revealed in excess of 4,000 firearms are stolen each year and converted into the illegal market -- now that's the major source of illegal guns in Australia."

Ellison, Senator Chris. 'Minister Blames Theft for Gun Crime Rise'  
*ABC News Online*, 28 December 2003

Senator Ellison said there was no evidence "whatsoever from any police force in Australia of there being a problem with guns being smuggled into Australia." He said most guns that fell into the wrong hands were stolen from licensed shooters.

Ellison, Senator Chris. 'States Won't Pay Gun Buyback Bill'  
*The Australian*, 6 November 2002

"Many jump onto illegal imports as being a possible way that this black market is being filled up, but it's probably likely importation is one of the lesser or least important sources of firearms coming into the black market... Some preliminary analysis of data of seized firearms, we are finding at least with handguns that at least a third, possibly up to half, of handguns have been sourced via theft... So theft does seem to be possibly a fairly important conduit, at least at the present time, for handguns."

Bricknell, Samantha. Senior researcher, Australian Institute of Criminology  
*ABC Radio National Background Briefing*, 13 November 2011

Glock pistols seized by NSW police in March, 2012 provided "the first published evidence of a sizeable batch of smuggled guns coming into Australia since the 1980s." [But] "there has been what's called an 'ant trade' of one gun here, two guns there, three guns here – a lot of them in parts, disassembled guns smuggled in through the mail, largely from the United States."

Alpers, Assoc Prof Philip. Sydney School of Public Health  
*ABC News 'AM'*, 15 March 2012

Popular opinion in Australia holds that many of the illegal firearms used in serious crime have been smuggled from overseas, particularly from China. This is not supported by the evidence. Firearms seized at crime scenes and in routine policing can commonly be traced back to licensed Australian owners and arms importers... Widely reported guesswork as to the predominant source of Australia's illicit firearms fuels a controversy beyond resolution. Until an adequate sample of crime guns have been traced back to their last lawful owners, either domestic or foreign, evidence-based policy options are likely to remain elusive. Although police protocols and forensic techniques are in place to trace seized illicit small arms, lack of resources and a perception of low priority commonly combine to prevent collection of the evidence required.

Alpers, Philip and Conor Twyford. *Small Arms in the Pacific*  
Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper No. 8  
Geneva, March 2003, pp. xvi, 17-18

[Philip Alpers](#)

Sydney School of Public Health  
Revised 14 November 2016