Staunch in the line of fire

Working for gun control is a great way to become the target of bitter attacks as Eugene Bingham discovered when he talked to Philip Alpers.

WHEN they start screaming about what you’re doing, says tobacco researcher and Sydney University professor Simon Chapman, he should know. For 30 years, he has fought cigarette companies, and in the past couple of years he has observed at close range another researcher facing an equally powerful lobby.

Chapman works with Philip Alpers, the former New Zealand TV journalist who now works internationally in the gun control field. He’s seen what Alpers endured.

“The difference between tobacco and firearms is that people who get hit under the collar about guns are packing heat,” Chapman says.

Alpers says Alpers sure gets people worked up. The National Rifle Association is the most powerful lobby, labels Alpers "a conspirator" in its “Who’s Who of the NRA” and is the UN Global Gun Ban Treaty. Alpers, you can tell, is quite chuffed.

It’s kind of an offshoot of his getting 14 years as he’s morphed from a journalist to a gun-control advocate.

His research has been focused on the United States for many years, including a visit to Harvard, which he now says is not one of the leading institutions in the United States in the fight against gun control.

His research has been around finding ways to reduce the number of guns and prevent them from falling into the wrong hands. In the past few years, he has written several books and has been on numerous television programs discussing gun control.

One of his recent projects is a documentary on gun control that was screened at the Sundance Film Festival. He has also been involved in a number of legal cases that have involved gun control.

For several years, Alpers has been involved in United Nations efforts to reduce small arms and has attended UN conferences on the issue. He has also been involved in a number of legal cases that have involved gun control.

In the past three years, Alpers has produced three major reports on the Pacific. He has been in PNG several times, and although his findings were somewhat disturbing, he says he never felt seriously endangered, thanks to experienced local guides. On one occasion, a local told him he was going to hold him captive and sell him to a "man who wants to see you dead.

He has found that the proliferation of weapons in the Pacific was not down to smugglers, as was widely believed, but to the use of firearms in crime and conflict, which were leaked from lawfully imported military.”

Never could [Alpers’ opponents] better him on the issues. A lot of the opposition was based on abuse.

MATT ROBSON

His research has been around finding ways to reduce the number of guns and prevent them from falling into the wrong hands. In the past few years, he has written several books and has been on numerous television programs discussing gun control.

One of his recent projects is a documentary on gun control that was screened at the Sundance Film Festival. He has also been involved in a number of legal cases that have involved gun control.

In the past three years, Alpers has produced three major reports on the Pacific. He has been in PNG several times, and although his findings were somewhat disturbing, he says he never felt seriously endangered, thanks to experienced local guides. On one occasion, a local told him he was going to hold him captive and sell him to a "man who wants to see you dead.

He has found that the proliferation of weapons in the Pacific was not down to smugglers, as was widely believed, but to the use of firearms in crime and conflict, which were leaked from lawfully imported military.”

GUNS: A MATTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH

If there’s anything that really riles Philip Alpers, it’s calling him anti-gun.

“We got petitions signed by the people from all over the country who were very upset,” he says from Sydney University.

While most people think of firearms as a criminal issue, Alpers has taken a public health approach.

He compares the proliferation of firearms in the Pacific to the use of defibrillators in public places.

While many politicians think amnesties or buy-backs are easy ways to solve problems, they rarely work. Firearms licensing and gun registration are central to most successful programs.

But there is no one size fits all approach — it depends on local culture and history.

Some of the most fun I had in the early days was explaining that...