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Do you think the Clay Target Shooting Sports are in jeopardy here in Australia? I keep hearing about a decline in numbers, but what worries me I have heard of the same trend in United States. I understand they are facing continued pressure by various anti shooting groups in regards to noise, steel shot etc. If they are in trouble in the U.S then I would have concerns about us here in the future.

Barry Hawkes, No address supplied

Barry it is a never ending battle to fight the anti gun movement no matter what country you live in. Here in Australia we have given up many of our firearms and rights of ownership over the past couple of decades without any proof that we have a safer society to live in. This is despite what some of the radical minority groups and some of our politicians (from both sides of politics) would have you believe.

In my opinion the entire gun buy back process and now the draconian firearms legislation that was introduced, particularly in New South Wales, has been a total waste of time at an enormous financial cost. The unfortunate scenario in NSW is that because the legislation is so restrictive it is very hard to get someone to come along to their local shooting range and try the sport for the first time. If it's not the clubs one and only annual "Open Day" for the year then they have to go and get a temporary permit which can often take a month to get and is only valid for 3 months. If that is not a major barrier to entry for our sport then I don't know what is.

I am curious where you are getting your information in regards to clay target shooting struggling in the U.S. I must admit I actually don't think that is the case. I will quote you some statistics compiled by the Amateur Trapshooting Association in the U.S in the mid 1990's in conjunction with the National Rifle Association and the University of Dayton in Ohio.

In 1996 the following was true and correct in regards to the membership of the ATA; 90% of its membership were male, the average age was 51, 76% were married, 87% owned their own home, 69% had a household income of above \$50,000, 58% fish, 60% hunt, 15 % were aged between 15 and 24, 26% were retired, 15 years was the average membership and on average each one of their members owns nine shotguns. In 1996 7.7 million shooters participated in target shooting of which 3.7 million shot clay targets in Trap and Skeet.

In 2006 the ATA had just fewer than 35,000 members and threw 79 million competition targets within their 940 affiliated clubs. My only piece of research that I could find to support your claim Barry was that in 1998, 54,208 ATA members participated in one or more of the 6,275 registered tournaments contested throughout North America. In total, 82,480,480 registered clay targets were thrown by over 1,200 gun clubs. I would point out that the decline may be due to the fact that Sporting Clays has really started to take off in the USA and the shooters have diversified, but not left the clay target sports. Remember the ATA only handles American Trap (DTL) events. Unfortunately I don't have access to the actual figures from the governing body of Sporting Clays in the States to prove this.

This is important data to have. I doubt if we have anywhere near as much data about our membership here in Australia which makes it hard to compare countries. However my point with these statistics is that they actually KNOW what their membership consists of so I guess that is the first step towards understanding how to combat a decline and target an increase.

Despite all these statistics I cannot prove to you that clay target shooting is going backwards in the United States. I would suggest however that they are more pro active in their membership over there. I will concede legislation like what is in place in NSW does hinder the sports growth here in Australia. One thing is absolutely clear in my mind though. Whether you shoot with a shotgun, rifle or pistol and it does not matter whether your target is paper, clay, metal or legal game, we must draw a very deep and concise line in the sand right now in regards to gun ownership and usage. If we let any level of government or minority lobby group dictate to us any further then we are in big trouble. I promise I won't need any statistics to back that up with.

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