



LICENSING CHANGES RAISE MAJOR CONCERNS FOR THE GUN TRADE



The proposed harmonisation of Section 1 and Section 2 licensing has become one of the most significant issues facing the UK gun trade. GTA chief executive Stephen Jolly sets out the implications for the trade and the wider supply chain.

The Government's intention to consult on harmonising Section 1 and Section 2 licensing has triggered widespread concern across the trade. For the Gun Trade Association, the implications for retailers are immediate and substantial. Speaking to Gun Trade Insider, chief executive Stephen Jolly said the proposal would represent a fundamental change to how shotguns are acquired and held in the UK.

He noted that the distinction between firearms and shotguns has been in place for more than a century and exists for practical reasons. Firearms certificate holders are required to justify each individual rifle on the basis of calibre and intended use. Shotgun licence holders are assessed as suitable persons but do not have to demonstrate a separate "good reason" for every gun. According to Jolly, this separation reflects the very different characteristics of the two categories.

Under the harmonisation proposal, every shotgun would require individual justification. Jolly said this would have far-reaching consequences for customers who currently enjoy the ability to purchase a shotgun for sport, collecting or occasional use without the delays associated with rifle variations. As he described, many shotguns are bought for reasons beyond pure utility – heritage, craft, sentimental value or general sporting interest. These, he suggested, may not meet a narrow interpretation of "good reason".

The practical implications for retailers could be severe. Jolly said that in many police force

areas, the wait for a firearms certificate can already exceed a year. Shotguns account for roughly 40 per cent of retail firearms sales. If obtaining one required the same extended variation process as rifles, he believes many customers would simply abandon purchases. "Tell me a business that can survive a 40 per cent fall in turnover at a time of rising costs," he said, noting that the GTA's initial survey data points to a potential loss of £800 million to £1 billion in annual retail revenue.

When associated activity is included – ammunition, accessories, gun cases, clothing, clay cartridges and general spend at shooting grounds – Jolly estimates the wider economic impact could approach £2 billion. He emphasised that these figures are provisional and will be refined as the Association completes its analysis of survey responses, but the direction of travel is clear. "No industry can sustain that," he said.

Alongside harmonisation, the Government is also expected to consult on a ban on private firearm and shotgun sales. Jolly said that while this could increase dealer-handled transactions, the overall number of sales would likely fall if fewer people were able or willing to obtain a shotgun licence under a new regime. He also noted there was a wider point of principle: if an individual is deemed safe to hold a licence, it follows that the licensing process should be trusted.

Jolly believes the proposals have emerged from high-profile incidents involving what the National Crime Agency describes as "violence-fixated individuals". He argues, however, that both the Plymouth and Luton

cases resulted from failures within the police licensing system, rather than weaknesses in the current shotgun licensing process. "The crime statistics show no evidence that legitimate licence holders are acting criminally and no evidence that criminals are targeting licence holders to steal their guns," he said. "The existing system is stringent, and it is working."

The GTA has been gathering data to support a detailed response once the consultation opens. More than 200 respondents have already completed the Association's survey, and additional research is underway on gun crime patterns, constituency-level licence distribution and related indicators. Jolly said he expects full datasets to be ready in early December.

The consultation is currently expected "by the end of the year", but the Home Office is being lobbied to move it into January to avoid the Christmas period shortening the window for submissions. A 10-week consultation is anticipated, followed by a Government review of responses and then a formal response. Only at that stage will it become clear whether Ministers intend to legislate.

If legislation does follow, Jolly expects the Government to introduce an entire new firearms bill rather than amendments to existing legislation or secondary legislation. He notes that such a bill could be expected to encompass moderators and other areas requiring primary legislation, making a consolidated bill more practicable. From there, the process would follow the standard parliamentary stages: First and Second Readings, Committee Stage, House of

Lords scrutiny and Third Reading before Royal Assent.

For retailers and others, Jolly's advice is to focus on the consultation rather than early appeals to MPs. The key objective, he said, is to ensure that the Home Office receives the fullest possible range of responses, supported by evidence and detailed reasoning. The GTA intends to provide template submissions, suggested lines of argument and relevant data to help retailers and shooting businesses take part effectively.

He added that once the consultation closes and the Government publishes its formal response, there may be room for discussion and negotiation with officials on specific elements. Until then, he believes the priority is ensuring that the scale of the potential economic and sector-wide impact is completely understood.

Jolly frames the situation in straightforward terms. "The Government has a duty to ensure public safety," he said. "But these measures target legitimate licence holders and the trade, rather than shortcomings in the current police licensing system that failed to stop two dangerous individuals from committing serious offences. The concern is that the industry could face long-term damage without seeing any demonstrable improvement in safety." ■

GET IN TOUCH

01684 291868
office@gtaltd.co.uk
www.gtaltd.co.uk