

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main headline is that we are able to report a surplus for the first time since 2009. This is good news, not least because it allows us to start thinking more earnestly about the way forward rather than having to adopt the more immediate hand-to-mouth approach that has been necessary over the past few years. A great deal of credit for this result goes to Andrew Mercer, our Chief Executive, and his hard-working staff, who have delivered this fine result. It should not be lost on any of us that we are now doing more with less – that is often how financial losses are stemmed and organisations are turned back into profit. Please note that our average employed staff numbers have fallen by around 20% since 2010, because we are more efficient and often more effective; consider, for example, the timely production of this year's annual report as but one example of this improved effectiveness. This does not happen by magic but takes a lot of hard work. On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank our staff for their considerable efforts, and I am sure you would like to join me in congratulating them with a show of appreciation.

The healthier state of our finances will now allow us to focus more of our time on the strategic issues that we face as an organisation and as the National Governing Body for the sport of target shooting. The role of any NGB is to set out and guide the backdrop to the environment in which its interests must operate. This brings many different challenges, including balancing the interests of our many different stakeholders across a number of different target shooting disciplines, while ensuring that the sport of target shooting continues to develop and even thrive over the coming years.

With the luxury afforded by better financial control and visibility, we have begun to get our heads, and in some cases our arms, around some of these issues. While the good news is that our ranges here at Bisley are becoming increasingly busy, access to military ranges away from Bisley remains a very real problem, and the changes to the structure of the Armed Forces are not likely to alter this trend in our favour. As troops are recalled from overseas and the Army relies upon a greater number of Reserves to fulfil its obligations, there will likely be even greater demand for MOD range time than there is now.

This remains a critical issue for us to address but our first order of business is to reassure the MoD of our ability to manage those of our members who use their ranges, not obviously a straight-forward task given the multiplicity of calibres that we all want to shoot. This is further complicated by the increasing propensity for members to wish to do their own home-loading, which further complicates some safety aspects. However, as a sign of their growing confidence in us, the MoD have recently asked us to investigate two incidents involving firearms that happened on MoD ranges, and I believe we should see this as a sign of our increasingly good working relationship together, which is a step in the right direction.

A further aspect is that of the cost of shooting. At the national level, we have been working assiduously on the issue of firearm certificate fees, dealing with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office via the BSSC. We are very hopeful that this work will bear fruit in managing the rise in fees associated with the registration of the ownership of firearms in the future.

Similarly, we have been involved in a shooting body funded study into the economic impact of shooting in this country. One immediate effect of our involvement is that the number of NRA members that have participated in the most recent study is already more than the entire

sample involved in the previous study of 2006. This is important work, in that it will set out the foundations for any debates surrounding the sport of target shooting, some of which could likely be conducted at the national level in a febrile atmosphere post an unfortunate catastrophic event. But it can also be true that other changes, for example a change of government, can instigate these debates. In such circumstances, it will be important for the long term health and continuance of our Association that we have the facts at our disposal; hence the work that we have been undertaking to ensure that this study has our input and is meaningful.

So, I hope that you agree with me that your Council should be looking at these wider issues and be seeking to develop the right environment for the target shooting sports to flourish. We are often guilty – me included - of letting our own individual concerns become front and centre in our own minds. Yes these are important issues, but I believe it would be reckless of those of us who are empowered to guide the organisation over the next few years, were we to forget that we have a duty not only to ourselves, but to all members of the Association, including the generations to come.

Healthy finances are central to this, but so too are our relationships with the Government, the MoD and the licensing authorities. Ultimately, if successful, this will enable us – even force us – to make some choices as to how we should develop our Association.

Our membership continues to grow. However more members will need more range capacity, more firearms and more cartridges. A typical business response to increasing demand in an area of limited capacity is to regulate that demand by increasing prices. Such a response would be contrary to the Council's overall thinking that we need to keep any rises in costs to inflation only (and therefore no rise at all in real terms), in what can be seen as an already expensive sport, in order to ensure that as many who want it can have access to target shooting.

This will require some earnest thought by your Council, and will have a significant effect on the future survival and prosperity of the NRA in the years to come.

That we can now face, or begin to face, these choices intelligently is down to our improved financial position.