

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am grateful to both the Chairman and Treasurer for setting out some of our policies and achievements over the past 12 months.

For my part, there are wider issues that I feel need drawing to your attention away from the more routine Bisley camp fair that can, too often, distract us from the major strategic issues facing target shooting.

The NRA faces an interesting conundrum as whilst our membership and demand for our ranges are both growing apace, storm clouds are gathering if we raise our eyes up from the Bisley plains.

Shooting and the ownership of firearms is seen by too many as a bad thing and the NRA, and many other shooting organisations, have done little to counter this view. Our communications are often targeted towards our friends, and we do very little to persuade or inform those who do not know or care little about shooting or merits about owning guns.

Furthermore, we are all too quickly tarnished by association with those with evil or dishonest intent, and commit terrible actions with firearms. If a young man steals a Mercedes car, gets drunk and then kills a child on a pedestrian crossing, then the media and general public do not demand action against all Mercedes drivers or car owners. So how have we allowed for this situation to arise? When there is a shooting incident, the media, public and authorities respond by calling for ever greater sanctions and restrictions against the law-abiding firearm and shotgun certificate holders.

The current proposals to prohibit 50 calibre and MARS rifle are just one recent example. The Home Office have ventured not a shred of evidence that such a ban would enhance public safety, but continue with their efforts to legislate.

Banning 50 calibre and MARS rifles is akin to installing speed bumps on the M3 to stop speeding on the M4!

It is hard not to form a view that a headline grabbing ban of such rifles is designed to distract attention away from the real problem that is knife crime.

However, shooting has a great story to sell, and there are plenty of us who enjoy this great sport. I estimate there are 2.75 million legally held firearms and shotguns held on certificate in the United Kingdom. Target shooting is surely the most acceptable public face of firearms ownership we can promote as it does not have the additional hurdle of justifying the shooting of live quarry.

The NRA Trustees recognise this challenge and have authorised our staff to start promoting target shooting to the wider public. Our ambition is to normalise target shooting and we expect no direct return for our efforts. We do not expect new entrants to the sport, or increased membership of the NRA. Wider acceptance of shooting and firearms ownership is our primary goal.

I have to tell you that our plans are at an early stage, and will focus on all forms of target shooting with the National Shooting Centre as the lead identity. Social media will be our primary platform, our current NRA Facebook presence has good reach, and probably the highest engagement of any shooting organisation. But the wrong content will not allow us to engage with those who have no interest or knowledge of firearms ownership.

Our resources are limited and need to be carefully used. Enlightened and progressive engagement with the licensing police is an area of increased effort by NRA staff. Police budgets are under pressure and firearms licensing is an easy target for cost cutting. We remain committed to offering services, free of charge, to train FEOs and help improve their service to the shooting community.

It would be wrong of me not to mention one of the many improvements at Bisley before I conclude, and I'd like to comment on electronic targets.

They are not new technology, but have been slow to appear on our ranges. Thankfully our recent installations on Stickle Down and Century ranges are proving that the NRA has the ability and finances to install reliable and accurate electronic targets.

That is not to say there haven't been problems, but Intarso targets have proved their worth, and have quickly become the target of choice for many regular Bisley shooters.

I have received fulsome praise for these targets. Compliments to me are something of an unusual experience!

But I've been generally delighted by the number of shooters who have been tempted to have a go at long range shooting, because they can now book a target for one hour.

Capturing the fall of shot electronically gives us the opportunity to ultimately display live scores on scoreboards, and online. Something that is essential if we are ever going to make the leap to conveying the excitement of target shooting to a viewing audience.

If we are going to secure target shooting in major international sporting events, such as the Commonwealth Games, then we need to develop exciting visual imaging for the broadcasters.

Thank you for your attention Ladies and Gentlemen, I shall hand back to the Chairman.

Andrew Mercer, Chief Executive