

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am grateful to both the Chairman and Treasurer for their reports of our activities and some achievements in 2018.

The year proved a mixed bag for the shooting community. Our efforts challenging the iniquitous prohibitions contained in the Offensive Weapons Bill yielded both modest success and absolute failure.

We succeeded in marshalling a good number of the shooting community behind the cause of saving .50" calibres; well-reasoned and carefully targeted arguments persuaded enough MPs to support our campaign, and .50" calibres were saved, at least for now.

We failed completely to save MARS and lever release rifles; the challenge to overcome shooting friendly politicians' concerns that these rifles were semi-automatics in all but a name proved very difficult. It is fair to say that internet videos of enthusiastic MARS and lever release shooters demonstrating the rate of fire of their rifles did not help our cause.

At times it appears to me that the greatest threats to shooting sit inside rather than outside of our tent. Our passion for our sport sometimes strays outside the realms of rationality.

I can quote one example; one enthusiastic proponent of MARS rifles wrote to his MP, copying me, explaining what carnage he could achieve using a moderated .22 rim fire semi-automatic rifle at two pre-prep schools and a kindergarten located at the end of the road where he lived. He graphically described how, and I quote, "a shot to the head would enter the skull and rather than exiting to the other side (as a higher calibre weapon would), it would ricochet back and forth inside". This description was intended to persuade the MP to oppose the firearms prohibitions in the Offensive Weapons Bill.

Shooting will struggle to gain support from those who govern us and garner positive PR when we have such views being expounded from within the shooting community.

One of the many lessons we have learnt in the Offensive Weapons process is that it is usually far too late to start a fight when then matter has reached Parliament. We need to engage in the debate at a much earlier stage in the process with licensing police, the Home Office and other bodies.

To this end we have recently started discussions with the Home Office on matters including miniature rifle range exemptions that are very much under consideration at the moment, and compensation arrangements for MARS and lever release rifles.

Away from Bisley there is greater scrutiny on the activities on private ranges, and we are investing increasing resources providing both technical and practical advice to range operators. These are both clubs and private individuals. I was particularly pleased last year to welcome to Bisley three new range operators; we hope a tour of our ranges gave them each an insight into the practical operations that turn the technical build programme into an efficient and enjoyable range complex for target shooters.

On another subject, managing the NRA's relationship with the MoD is interesting; we are blessed with a long history of positive engagement but cannot rely solely on this to ensure continuing access to MoD ranges for our affiliated clubs. We need to respect the MoD's rules, regulations and indeed ethos, and ensure that civilian shooting continues to be viewed as a safe and remunerative activity conducted by responsible clubs and individuals.

We have also been active lobbying for shooting to be included in the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games. Last December Bisley was proposed as the preferred venue for all shooting disciplines. The decision as to which additional sports will be added to the games programme was promised in January but further deadlines have come and gone without any decision being confirmed.

The additional sports will require additional funding from central government; it is hard however, not to surmise that the febrile state of politics at present are proving a distraction to making a decision.

On a brighter note, 2019 is a very busy year at Bisley for the NRA, we have to deliver a successful 150th Imperial, we've recently opened the new Pavilion café and kitchen, we are getting towards the end of constructing an additional 39 serviced caravan pitches on Waldegrave site. We are having a significant amount of work generated managing the consequences resulting from noise complaints, some from within the camp, others from outside. And of course, as the Chairman has already mentioned, we are furiously planning the execution of the management of Cottesloe Heath and Long Siberia ranges.

Thank you for your attention.

Andrew Mercer
Group Chief Executive & Secretary General