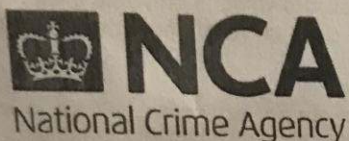


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Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid MP
Home Secretary
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11 October 2018

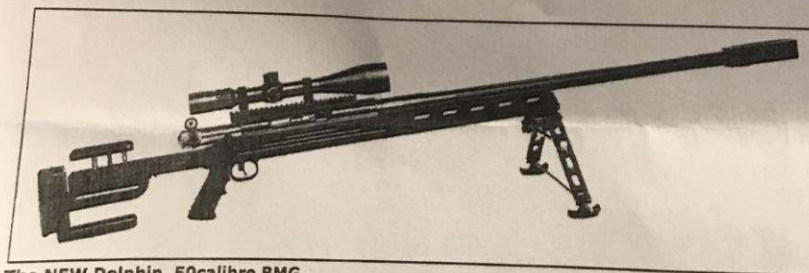
Dear Home Secretary,

Offensive Weapons Bill

You requested that I set out the National Crime Agency's position on the provisions in the Offensive Weapons Bill connected to firearms, specifically the prohibition of high energy rifles. I am writing in light of the Agency's role as an operationally independent law enforcement organisation, which leads the fight against serious and organised crime, and as informed by our intelligence and professional expertise on firearms.

I fully recognise the concerns of the shooting community on this issue, which would see a specific field of target shooting undermined. However, the Agency's position is simply that the weapons affected by this proposal - in particular the .50 calibre rifle - are built around enormously powerful cartridges originally designed for military use on the battlefield and to have devastating effect. I accept that there is no known evidence (outside of the fatal attacks on security forces in Northern Ireland in the 1990s) of their direct use in crime, but for the reasons that I will set out, the Agency believes that there is a strong case to take the proactive step to set an upper limit for the power of firearms which can be held on licence, used for sports shooting and stored in domestic dwellings in the UK.

Firstly, to give a sense of why these weapons - which are the most powerful that it is currently possible to hold on a UK Firearms Certificate for shooting purposes - require this unique approach, I will describe their extreme capability. The most numerous firearms in this high muzzle-energy class currently held on Firearms Certificate in the UK are chambered for the .50 Browning cartridge. The cartridge remains in worldwide military service both in heavy machine guns and in rifles designed around the anti-structure capabilities of the .50 round. One of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) user requirements for the .50 Calibre Rifle is to immobilise a small or medium sized truck at a range of 1800 metres. To put this in perspective, this would theoretically mean that a shooter firing from the Royal Courts of Justice could stop a delivery van outside the Houses of Parliament.



The NEW Dolphin .50calibre BMG

I am aware of the debate regarding capabilities of military ammunition and the ammunition available to civilians. It is acknowledged that the MoD have specialist ammunition available to them however, even the standard .50 "ball" ammunition has enormous "residual strike energy" at the target, at the typical competition ranges quoted by representatives of the shooting sports community. The propellant mass in a standard M33 .50 "ball" round is nearly ten times as great as that in the standard "ball" round used in the

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British Army's primary battlefield rifle, the L85¹. It should be noted that .50 Browning is only one example and by no means the most powerful cartridge in the high muzzle energy class currently held on firearms certificate.

We cannot be assured that weapons with this extreme capability can be stored by license holders in a domestic dwelling with a proportionate level of security. This is particularly relevant given the continuing levels of thefts and burglaries of licensed firearms. There have been 3 such burglaries already this month and since the Parliamentary Committee heard evidence from the NCA, CT Policing and NABIS in July, a total of 17 rifle and 115 shotguns have been stolen. This demonstrates that even where security provisions have been taken, the risk cannot fully be mitigated of one of these devastatingly powerful weapons being stolen alongside more widely held firearms.

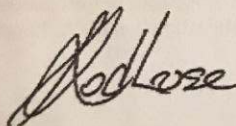
Critically, there has been a case in 2016 which was cited in the evidence provided to the Parliamentary Committee which involved the theft of .50 calibre rifle and a number of other weapons. One of the other weapons was used in a subsequent shooting and the .50 calibre rifle was recovered by police having been secreted on open ground (this is a common tactic used in respect of criminal firearms to avoid them being recovered and connected to offenders during house searches). The barrel of the rifle had been shortened, indicating criminal intent – evidence that reflects our caution about whether such a weapon has not been or would not be directly used in crime.

It is also not possible to be fully reassured on the prospect of these weapons being sought by legislative firearms licence holders who have criminal intent. These are evidently a tiny fraction of the total community, but we know from Operation Gold Dust, that one of Paul Edmunds co-conspirators, Mohinder Surdar, was involved in the organised supply of weapons and ammunition to the armourer of a West Midlands based crime group, and Surdar himself was the legal owner of a .50 Calibre rifle supplied to him by Edmunds. I have included a photograph of Surdar, a doctor, with this weapon.

In terms of the changing context and the need to keep legislation up to date with the risks presented by these firearms, seizures of weapons at the UK border this year has demonstrated the degree to which crime groups are seeking more powerful weapons. Four separate seizures have involved mixed loads of firearms which have included fully automatic weapons. The criminal use of firearms has not yet seen an escalation – the overwhelming proportion of criminal discharges still involve shotguns and handguns – but the emergence of higher powered weapons arriving in the criminal market makes it a possibility that we must be prepared for, and where we should seek to mitigate the most extreme risks.

Finally, in the UK, we have almost always taken action to prohibit particular high risk categories of weapons *ex post facto*; in the wake of tragedies in Hungerford and Dunblane for example. It is right to say that these particular weapons have not yet been used in criminal or other malign circumstances. Were they to be, the effect could clearly be catastrophic. My view is that we have a strong case to prohibit a category of weapon used by a relatively small group of individuals (129 of these weapons are legally held), and that to do so may prevent very serious offending in the future.

Yours sincerely



Steve Rodhouse
Director General - Operations
National Crime Agency