

Secretary General's Speech

2023 proved to be a year of challenges and opportunity for the NRA. We did not escape from the effects of the much reported "cost of living crisis"; our particular version saw significant increases in energy and payroll costs wash away the increases in our revenues.

But as the Treasurer has reported, we still reported a surplus in 2023, albeit an extremely modest £51,000 from a turnover of £10 million.

Surpluses are important as they enable the funding of new capital projects, be they a new online range booking system, more electronic targets, extended firing points, refurbished buildings; new accommodation developments at Bisley; or the acquisition or development of ranges away from Bisley.

Developing and acquiring regional ranges is a grinding marathon demanding resilience and persistence. With booking targets on MoD ranges becoming ever more challenging we need to explore every opportunity to retain, re-open or develop ranges away from Bisley. In 2023 we invested significant resources in progressing plans to reconfigure new ranges on a site near Glasgow, and negotiating the purchase of a shooting ground in Nottinghamshire. It was also the year that saw the culmination of 5 year's work to commission, build and open a new firing point on Warcop range in Cumbria, enabling 50 calibre shooting at tank hulks. The Warcop project succeeded due to cracking support from MoD range staff, the hard work and determination of Chris Stephenson, Chairman of the Fifty Calibre Shooters Association and NRA Regional Ranges Manager, Nic Couldrey.

World events continue to present challenges and opportunities. Conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have disrupted our usual supply chains of ammunition and components. Our success in securing bulk deliveries of most popular lines of ammunition is countered by the problems of funding of record stock holdings that restrict our ability to commission other projects.

These conflicts have prompted concerns regarding National Security. These may provide opportunities for the NRA to be more effective in delivering activities in evidence and supporting Defence of the Realm. Training people to shoot accurately and safely is a core activity and skill set of the NRA.

On a national level we are seeing growing scrutiny on compliance with the rules and regulations governing the civilian ownership and use of firearms, and the operation of Home Office Approved Clubs. In most cases problems arise because certificate holders or club officials have a relaxed interpretation of the rules. There are also cases resulting from over-enthusiastic or poorly trained firearms licensing personnel. We find that offering training, advice, and support to hard-pressed police firearms teams is more productive than retreating to the trenches to throw brickbats. The focus must surely be on ensuring police firearms licensing staff are properly trained and resourced to concentrate on assessing the suitability of the applicant and certificate holder.

The General Election will undoubtedly change the landscape for the shooting community. Major issues such as the UK Reach proposals to prohibit the use of lead in ammunition outdoors, the review of firearm fees, and proposals to remove the requirement for licensing sound moderators are likely to be determined by a Government whose attitude to target shooting is not clear.

We need to pay attention, work with our colleagues from other shooting organisations, and bring our resources to bear to ensure that the impact of proposed legislative changes do not damage target shooting.

Much of the work we do with the MoD, government, police and other statutory bodies goes unreported, and there is always a fine balance between the need to be effective and the need to secure credit for the NRA for our efforts.

The NRA's home at Bisley is the engine room for the charity but there is a growing need to focus more of our resources to support target shooting in the regions. We recently hosted a forum for club officials in Solihull, attended by representatives of clubs from as far afield as Cornwall and Scotland. The lively debates focused on the big issues of the day such as access to MoD ranges, lead in ammunition, regional training and firearms licensing. I was struck firstly by the fact that the club officials had committed a great deal of their time and money to attend the Forum on behalf of their club members; and secondly by the complete lack of debate on matters such as caravan sites and potholes that account for so much vigorous discord at Bisley. We need to engage far more effectively with target shooters who never shoot at Bisley.

The NRA has proved resilient over the decades but we cannot be complacent. There is much to do but never enough resources to do it all. Thankfully target shooting is a life-long passion for many, and I remain optimistic that we will navigate our way through the challenges ahead.