Thank you for responding to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s Call for Evidence on the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill. All submissions will be examined and considered as part of the Committee’s scrutiny of the Bill.

Please be aware that questions marked with an asterisk (*) require an answer before you can submit the form.

Follow the Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s Twitter feed - all Committee tweets on this Bill will have the hashtag #aw&lbill.

**1. Please supply your name and contact details:**

Name: Dr Mick North
Organisation: Gun Control Network
Address 1:
Address 2:
City/Town:
Postcode:
Country:
Email address (if no email leave blank):
Phone Number:
2. Please confirm that you have read and understood the Scottish Parliaments “Policy on the treatment of written evidence by subject and mandatory committees”:

☑ Yes

3. Please confirm whether you are content for your name to be published with your submission:

☑ Yes

☐ No

4. Which of the three categories below best describes your interest in the Bill (please tick only one)?

☑ Personal

☐ Professional

☐ Commercial

5. Do you wish your email to be added to the Committee’s distribution list for updates on progress of the Bill:

☑ Yes

☐ No
6. Invitations to give oral evidence to the Committee on the Bill will be based on the submissions received. If you wish your submission to be included amongst those considered for possible invitation to give oral evidence, please indicate here.

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. You may answer questions on the entire Bill, or on any part of the Bill. Please indicate which parts of the Bill you are responding to? (You may select as many options that apply).

☐ All of the Bill

☐ Equalities, climate change and other Scottish Government objectives

☑ Air Weapons

☐ General licensing issues

☐ Alcohol licensing

☐ Civic licensing – taxi/private hire car licensing

☐ Civic licensing – scrap metal dealers

☐ Civic licensing – theatre licensing

☐ Civic licensing – sexual entertainment venues
1. **Air Weapons Licensing**

You may respond to all the questions or only those you have a specific interest in. (Text boxes have no word limit, they will increase in size accordingly).

**13. In what ways will the creation of an air weapons licensing system in Scotland contribute to preserving public order and safety, reducing crime and advancing public health policy?**

See Below

**14. Is there sufficient provision, or sufficient capacity to provide, suitable numbers of air weapons clubs across all areas of Scotland for use by registered air weapons owners/users?**

See 22

**15. How will the air weapons licensing system affect those using air weapons for personal/recreational use?**

See 22
16. How will the air weapons licensing system affect those aged 14 to 17 who use air weapons?

We are of the view that the encouragement of youngsters to shoot and take up an interest in the sport should not be given priority over the need for public safety and that the provisions in the system are appropriate.

17. How will the air weapons licensing system affect those using air weapons for commercial/professional reasons (for example: for pest control; as part of the tourist/hunting season; as part of fairs, paintballing centre, entertainment sector etc.)?

See 22

18. How will the air weapons licensing system affect those using air weapons for competitive sporting purposes?

See 22

19. Is it equitable for those applying for an air weapons certificate to pay a fee which cannot be refundable irrespective of whether a certificate is granted or not?
Yes, it is perfectly equitable for all those applying to pay a non-refundable fee. This would help to ensure that only genuine applications are made. The costs of the licensing process, including those for failed applications, should not be borne by the taxpayer.

20. Will the air weapons licensing system have a positive or negative impact on other areas of the public sector in Scotland (eg. The work of local government, public agencies etc.)?

If the licensing process is suitably funded then there should be no negative impact. Misuse of air weapons often results in damage to premises and vehicles used by the public as well as injury to workers such as bin men, postmen and firefighters. Restricting the availability of air weapons should reduce these occurrences and the costs involved.

21. What, if any, might the unintended consequences of introducing an air weapons licensing system in Scotland be?

None that would affect its aim to improve public safety.

22. Do you have any other comments to make on air weapons licensing aspects of the Bill?

For those with a genuine professional need or sporting interest there may be some initial inconvenience and small expense, but this should be balanced against the elimination of irresponsible, careless and unnecessary airgun use, of which serious shooters presumably disapprove. For professionals the costs of licensing could be offset against tax. There will no doubt be more impact of those involved in other shooting activities such as plinking, but as some of these activities cause genuine alarm among other members of the public those concerned might need to consider adapting the interests and undertake an activity with less potential risk to their neighbours and fellow citizens.
Anything that reduces the bureaucracy of the licensing process would be helpful. Gun Control Network believes that those with a firearms or shotgun certificate should not be expected to go through the full licensing process.

It will be essential for the registration process to be backed up by a suitably-funded media campaign to guarantee full public awareness. There should also be provision for a hand-in of all the guns of those who do not wish to be part of the licensing system.

**GUN CONTROL NETWORK**

**Air Weapons Licensing**

13. In what ways will the creation of an air weapons licensing system in Scotland contribute to preserving public order and safety, reducing crime and advancing public health policy?

Gun Control Network believes that it is anomalous for one category of gun to be exempt from licensing on the basis of its mechanism of firing. This fails to take sufficient account of the dangers posed by air weapons. They cause serious and even fatal injuries to humans, they maim and kill wildlife and domestic animals, they are used to threaten and intimidate (made worse by the promotion of some air pistols, for example, being modelled on handguns and advertised as looking like the “real thing”) and cause damage to property, all of which impact on the wellbeing of the public. Air weapons are generally lower-powered than other firearms, but while many of the injuries from pellets are of a less serious nature than those caused by other guns, airguns are nevertheless capable of inflicting life-changing injuries including blindness. At present, however, the lack of licensing continues to result in these weapons being treated too casually, and there is still a tendency to regard them simply as boys’ toys. This has lead to a careless and reckless attitude among some owners. Licensing would provide the strongest possible indicator to all potential users that these are dangerous objects with the potential to cause harm and stress to their fellow citizens.

We have been heartened by the fall in airgun crime over recent years and are sure that the provisions in the Violent Crime Reduction Act have contributed to this, which highlights the fact that gun control works. Nevertheless offences involving
air weapons still make up the largest proportion of gun offences. The 2012-13 statistics on firearm offences in Scotland show that one of the two attempted murders involved an air weapon, 43 of the 65 incidents in which someone was injured involved an air weapon and of the 194 instances when a gun was fired 132 of these involved an air weapon.

In a report published by the Home Office in February 2014 on Recorded Firearms Offences for 2012-13 in England and Wales, where the legislation is currently the same as in Scotland i.e. no licensing for most air weapons, the authors commented that it is likely that “air weapon offences largely do not come to the attention of police unless they are fired” and so it is likely that the total is in fact an underestimate of the actual number of offences. Gun Control Network often receives details of airgun misuse from members of the public, not least from pet owners describing incidents involving their animals, and notes reports of attacks on wildlife, especially birds, and this anecdotal information also leads us to believe that the extent of airgun misuse is significantly greater than indicated by the Recorded Offences.

Furthermore whilst the majority of offences with air weapons relate to criminal damage, they can, as the authors of the Home Office report acknowledge, also cause serious injury and sometimes fatalities. It is noted in the report that when air weapons are used in offences regarded as causing violence to people these are more likely to cause injury then when a non-air weapon is used. During 2013 a South Yorkshire man was killed with an airgun and the offender subsequently convicted of manslaughter, and a couple from east London died in a murder-suicide committed by the husband with an air rifle. There have been a number of other fatalities over recent years, the victims often children and young people - GCN knows of at least 15 who were shot by other children and young people who often had access to an unsecured airgun. At the time this submission was being compiled an 11-year-old boy in County Durham was shot in the head with an airgun while watching a football match. The reports of the shooting were accompanied by a shocking picture of the victim with a .22 pellet lodged close to his eye - he could easily have been blinded and said himself that he was lucky to be alive.

It is clear from the many press reports of air weapon incidents which Gun Control Network has compiled over the years that the view that the majority of the offences are caused by “criminals” is misleading. Although some criminals do use airguns to threaten, the reports show that a large number of the more serious incidents are the result of reckless and careless behaviour by people, who otherwise would not be considered criminals but have used their weapons irresponsibly. It also appears that the problems are not confined to young people, as the perpetrators and victims span a wide age range.

One of the main responsibilities of any government is to ensure the safety of the public. Clearly a balance has to be struck between this prime responsibility and the wishes of some citizens to undertake activities, including hobbies and sport, with dangerous objects. The Scottish Government’s proposals would not prevent those with a genuine interest in using air weapons from continuing to shoot but
would make certain that ownership and use are treated with the appropriate degree of seriousness. It therefore strikes the right balance.

Although there might be initial difficulties in ensuring that all owners comply with licensing, the need for a licence for all future purchases should result in the pool of air weapons, especially those held by casual owners, diminishing. This reduction would be greatly enhanced by a well-publicised amnesty. Whilst there may be an initial increase in offences as a result of non-compliance with the licensing process, the long term impact will be to discourage those whose casual use of airguns has contributed to the problem of gun crime with an eventual further fall. Licensing provides a means of demonstrating that air weapons are indeed dangerous objects. The knowledge that the Scottish Government views the problem to be serious enough to tighten legislation has no doubt already had an impact, but it is essential that the measure is now followed through. Gun Control Network is in no doubt that this is a significant piece of public safety legislation.