

28 February 2025

Submission: For Public Consultation on the Arms Act Rewrite

Introduction: Raised in Australia, I remember being a similar age to Alannah Mikac (6 years old) and her little sister Madaline (3 years old) when they lost their lives with their mother during the Port Arthur, Tasmanian massacre in 1996.¹ They were 3 lives of 35 taken that day.²

I can easily recall the wave of grief that swept the Nation and later settled upon our little primary school as we prayed for the lost lives of children we had never met and would never meet in adulthood because their lives had been cut-short by an out-of-control gunman. I also remember the news coverage of the national firearms recall and the Australian Prime Minister banning and collecting automatic and semiautomatic weapons nationwide. We were encouraged as children to cut out newspaper clippings and bring them to class to discuss. The photographs of guns thrown in enormous piles to be destroyed, grown men crying while handing over their weapons at collection depots, the flowers, candles and cards being placed at Port Arthur, and us as children with our heads bent in sadness and prayer. These are the memories still etched in my mind and heart almost 29 years later.

I was still living in Australia when the shootings at the Christchurch Mosque took place in March 2019. Media coverage in Australia of this tragic event included televising the live memorial service held in recognition of the 51 lives lost that day.³

When comparing the two incidents and the immediate responses of both Prime Ministers in each country, I would comment that they were working in their peoples' and Nation's best interest at that time. The Hon. John Howard certainly moved swiftly to physically eradicate and prevent a similar tragedy happening again under his watch. While the Rt. Hon. Jacinda Ardern held the Nation's loss with such poise and grace that the reverberations could be clearly seen and felt from Australia.

Which leads me to ask: Is there more we can do to strengthen gun control in Aotearoa, New Zealand? Absolutely.

¹Alannah and Madaline Foundation. (2025). <https://www.alannahandmadaline.org.au/>

²Encyclopaedia Britannica. (ed. 2025, February 11). *Port Arthur Massacre Australia [1996]*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Port-Arthur-Massacre>

³ BBC. (2019, March 29). *Christchurch attacks: Victims honoured with national memorial service*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47742313>

Is this rewrite to the Arms Act adequate in installing lasting and necessary safety and peace to this Nation? Possibly not, but it is a step in the right direction.

In sharing this personal account as an introductory to the questions raised in the public survey on the Arms Act Rewrite, it is this imagery of the dignity and sanctity of human life we wish to focus on in our responses as we continue to advocate for a more just and peaceful Aotearoa, New Zealand and world.

Kathleen Ngaronoa Card

Executive Secretary
Justice and Peace Commission
Catholic Diocese of Auckland

As a Catholic Justice and Peace Commission we can answer the following questions in this public consult to the best of our ability following the guidelines and principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST).

1. What is the purpose of the Registry, as you understand it?

The Firearms Registry's purpose is to centralise the tracking of firearms owned by licensed individuals, enhancing accountability and safety. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) highlights the dignity of the human person. The protection of life aligns with the Registry's goal of reducing harm and ensuring that firearms are used responsibly.⁴ The common good is also promoted by safeguarding public safety, a key principle in New Zealand's efforts to reduce firearm-related violence.⁵

2. Do you think that the Firearms Registry is or will contribute towards public safety once fully established? (and why?)

Yes, the Firearms Registry will improve public safety by ensuring that firearm ownership is traceable, which increases ownership accountability and reduces the probability of illegal access and misuse. Solidarity (CST) underscores that public safety requires collective responsibility. New Zealand has seen success in reducing gun-related violence through similar measures, such as the buy-back programme following the Christchurch shooting in 2019.⁶

⁴ Pope Paul VI. (1965, November 7). *GAUDIUM ET SPES - Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Vatican II: The Holy See.

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html n. 26

⁵ NZ Herald. (2022, June 4). *Jack Tame: Gun violence now doesn't mean the buyback was a failure*. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/jack-tame-gun-violence-now-doesnt-mean-the-buyback-was-a-failure/I3RPA4FWEBKPJHQ5NF267BFS4Q/>

⁶ Devlin, C. (2019, March 21). *Support for Government's gun ban in wake of Christchurch shooting*. Stuff. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/christchurch-shooting/111468109/support-for-governments-gun-ban-in-wake-of-christchurch-shooting>

3. If you or your members have registered firearms using the online process, what was your experience?

We have not formally surveyed our members on their firearm ownership, but CST advocates for subsidiarity, ensuring processes are accessible to all where and if necessary.⁷ New Zealand's online registration system should be easy to navigate, encouraging citizens to fulfil their duties responsibly while promoting accessibility.⁸

4. If you or your members have registered firearms using the call centre, what was your experience?

As with the online process, no formal survey has been conducted. CST stresses accessibility to services for all, particularly vulnerable groups.⁹ The call centre needs to ensure accessibility and inclusivity, allowing individuals to comply with regulations regardless of their access to technology, which is in line with the principle of the common good.

5. What education or support has the Firearms Safety Authority provided you, or your members, about the Registry?

The FSA has provided regular communications. CST stresses the importance of education for responsibility, particularly in helping individuals understand their duties to the common good.¹⁰ New Zealand's Firearms Safety Authority has been instrumental in offering educational resources on firearm safety, helping to build a more responsible firearm culture. We are encouraged that the MOJ re-write information for this Act has been summarised, simplified and translated into a wide cross selection of languages including NZSL and braille. We are still concerned that the sheer volume of information required to fully understand the Act re-write process is still incomprehensible to the everyday, average Kiwi.

6. What barriers or concerns do licence holders experience when registering firearms? No formal survey has been done, but barriers could include complex procedures or data concerns. CST emphasizes that procedures should be fair and just, with a focus on individuals' dignity and not creating unnecessary obstacles.¹¹ Ensuring

⁷ Pope Pius XI. (1931, May15). *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO – Encyclical Letter*. Vatican: The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html n.79

⁸ New Zealand Police. (2025). *Firearms & Safety (FSA)*. <https://www.police.govt.nz/advice-services/firearms-safety-fsa>

⁹ Pope Benedict XVI. (2009, June 29). *CARITAS IN VERITATE – Encyclical Letter*. Vatican: The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html n.48

¹⁰ Pope John XXIII. (1963, April 11). *PACEM IN TERRIS - Encyclical Letter*. Vatican: The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html n.21

¹¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, n.75

that the registration process is straightforward and supports public trust and reassurance in the system.

7. Do you think the level of personal information requested for the Registry is appropriate?

Yes, the personal information required is appropriate to ensure accountability and public safety. CST advocates for the just use of personal data in promoting the common good, ensuring that privacy rights are respected while fulfilling public safety goals.¹² The Firearms Registry balances safety and privacy needs.

8. Do you think that there are any Registry regulations that are unnecessary for ensuring public safety? (If so, what?)

No, all current regulations appear necessary. CST's focus on the protection of human life supports comprehensive regulations that aim to reduce gun violence and promote safety and peace.¹³ New Zealand's comprehensive approach, especially after the 2019 Christchurch tragedy, illustrates the need for such regulations to prevent misuse.

9. Do you or any of your members have any suggestions about changes that could be made to the Registry which could contribute towards public safety?

Yes, shortening the implementation timeline and recording ammunition sales would improve safety. CST stresses the importance of swift action to protect life and society. Any delay in the process needs to be reduced. New Zealand's decision to introduce stricter gun control laws post-Christchurch is a key example of effective and timely measures.

10. Are there any other comments that you would like to provide regarding the Registry?

The Registry is essential in promoting responsible ownership and enhancing public safety. CST emphasizes peacebuilding and the common good, particularly in ensuring that the use of firearms does not undermine societal well-being.¹⁴ New Zealand's approach to comprehensive gun control after mass shootings highlights the role of such registries in reducing harm.

¹² Pope John Paul II. (2005, April). *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Vatican: The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html n.198.

¹³ Pope John Paul II. (1995, March 25). *EVANGELIUM VITAE - Encyclical Letter*. Vatican: The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html n.56

¹⁴ *Pacem In Terris*, n. 113

Conclusion:

We are reminded that "every human life is sacred and inviolable (Gen 9:5)"¹⁵

In the wake of tragedy, the Church advocates for legislation that places a high priority on safeguarding innocent lives while respecting responsible gun and weapon use for legitimate purposes such as hunting, pest control, and sport shooting.

We cannot stress enough that any review or rewrite of the Arms Act needs to align with the goal of preventing firearms from being misused and falling into the wrong hands, to protect life and promote the common good.

¹⁵ *Evangelium Vitae*, n.53