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Operations Support / Firearms Services

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CLUB NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2021

As we put a tough and demanding 2020 behind us and look forward to a brighter 2021, I would like to thank sport and target shooting clubs for their continued support and goodwill towards the staff of Firearms Services.

I hear regularly from staff of the enjoyable interactions they have had with members of your clubs and want to acknowledge that it is rarely club members that put the community at risk with firearms. This is because in the most part clubs provide environments where responsible and safe practices are both learned and enforced.

The staff of Firearms Services looks forward to working with your members in 2021.

Please find outlined below important information worth circulating to your members:

2022 Relicensing Peak – How you can help.

Licence holders would be aware that every five (5) years Firearms Service is significantly affected due to the pure volume of licences that require renewal. We describe this 5-yearly event as a Major Relicensing Year and this anniversary aligns with when firearms laws commenced in 1996/7. The next Major Relicensing Year is 2022 and in that year Firearms Services staff will be attempting to process as efficiently as possible more than 15,000 licence renewals. A normal year is between 3,500 and 4,500 licences.

Admittedly previous attempts to manage this peak year have not been as successful as the department would have liked and have resulted in significant delays and avoidable processing errors that have affected licence holders in many ways.

The reason I mention this is because this time around we will be doing three main things to reduce the impacts on licence holders:

- Employing and training staff in advance of 2022.
- Sending out renewal notices early to increase processing time.
- Sending electronic reminders and confirmations.

I would encourage clubs to promote to their members that the earlier licence holders lodge their renewal form the better. In the end this will benefit members with timely renewal of their licence.

It is useful to note that a licence renewal cannot be processed without proof for a licence holder's genuine reason/s. Please remind your members to check the inside of their yellow renewal form on page two for advice on what proof they are required for each Genuine Reason. The most common proofs required are for Genuine Reasons 1, 2 and 3.

For Genuine Reason 1 – Sport or Target Shooting, proof such as copies of club membership cards or membership letters from the club confirming current financial membership and member expiry date. Firearms Services may also require specific information such as how long the applicant has been a member of that club (in regard to *Permit To Acquire applications*) and confirmation that the relevant club runs competitions and activities for the same category of firearms relevant to the applicant.

For Genuine Reason 2 – Recreational Hunting or Vermin Control, include a document providing written authority to shoot particular animals or vermin on specified land. The document must be from the owner of that land where the person will shoot (this could be the licence holder themselves); the Director of National Parks and Wildlife; or The Chief Executive Officer of Sustainable Timber Tasmania (previously Forestry). The document must contain the following information: the applicant's full name and address (who is permitted to do the shooting); a clear statement that they are allowed to shoot on that land; if it is government property the letter must be on official letterhead; if on private property the property owner's full name, signature and contact details. Where possible, to assist Firearms Services staff it would be desirable to include details such as the size, location, lot number on a plan (if relevant) and crops or stock that are present on this land.

For Genuine Reason 3 – Primary Production, for renewals an applicant is required to provide confirmation that they are the owner, leasee (renter) or employee of a primary producer; property details such as size, address, property identification code (PIC) and type of stock/crops produced; whether you intend to use a firearm for vertebrate pest suppression and/or destroying animals to avoid pain and suffering; list of all stock animals/vertebrate pests to be suppressed by the use of a firearm. If the applicant is the landholder, they must provide a statutory declaration proving ownership. If the applicant is the leasee of the relevant land, a copy of the lease document or statutory declaration certified by the owner of that land.

If the applicant is an employee of a primary producer, a statutory declaration from the employer confirming employee status (full or part time) and their job role or title.

The applicant must supply sufficient documents to prove that they are regularly engaged in the business of primary production such as: statutory declaration by the primary producers certified accountant; current ABN; part tax returns; business records; and a Crop Protection Permit from Department Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE).

For a primary producer with a Category C firearms licence a completed Category C for Primary Production Statutory Declaration is required.

For access to these forms, visit <https://fas.police.tas.gov.au/forms-reference-info/>.

The obvious question is: If I renew early does that mean I lose time off my licence? The answer is NO. Your next licence will commence after your current licence. All early lodgement means is that Firearms Services can spread the workload of processing 15,000 licences over a longer period.

New Regional Firearms Safety Training Course

For those clubs located on the East Coast please be aware that TasTAFE now deliver their Firearms Safety Training Course at St Helens. Contact TasTAFE for further details.

Digital Service Delivery for Firearms Licensing

The Tasmanian Government has recently committed \$46 Million funding over four years to the Department of Police Fire and Emergency Management to develop and update systems to support business operations. Included in this figure is funding to develop a system that allows for new services like:

- Applying for a firearms licence online
- Application for renewing of a firearms licence online
- Changing licence details online
- Applying for a Permit to Acquire online
- Functionality to support clubs, firearms dealers and TasTAFE

At this stage there is no timeline on when these services will be available, and it is anticipated that there will be consultation with the firearms community well before there is any change. When we know more about timelines clubs will be informed and invited to participate in discussions on the subject.

Information Sheets

Firearms Services will be releasing new Information Sheets on our website throughout 2021 it may be worth encouraging your members to occasionally review the 'Forms and Reference Information' page to see if any of this information is of assistance.

Visit <https://fas.police.tas.gov.au/forms-reference-info/>

The first Information Sheets to be released focus on strategies to keep people safe specifically attempting to reduce firearms related suicide in Tasmania.

Firearms Related Suicide is a confronting subject and one that none of us would normally wish to discuss. For those that have experienced it whether that be family, friends or first responders these are situations that are difficult to forget and have lifelong impacts.

In the past two years Tasmania Police has been working with the State Coroner to understand the nature and details behind firearms related suicide and then to identify strategies to help the community to reduce firearms related suicide. The research undertaken by the State Coroner identifies:

- That in 2017, 187 persons died from firearms-related injury in Australia with an estimated 4,378 years of potential life lost.
- In the past decade Tasmania has had the highest rate of firearms suicide in Australia.
- More than 200 Tasmanians have lost their lives from firearms related suicide in the past 18 years.
- Firearms related suicide is the second most common means of suicide in Tasmania.

The World Health Organisation advises that suicides are preventable and that at the top of the list of effective suicide prevention strategies is reducing access to means of suicide.

The new information sheets seek to provide the community with strategies to assist in reducing access to firearms when a family member or friend is showing the signs of poor mental health. Many of the strategies focus on identifying practical options to reduce or eliminate access to firearms when a person is at risk.

Of course, reports to police in relation to these matters will always be treated seriously and if that is the most appropriate way to remove firearms please do not hesitate to contact Tasmania Police on 000.

SMS and Email reminders:

Just a recap that electronic reminders started in April 2018.

Electronic reminders (SMS and Email) were introduced to reduce the number of licences that might expire due to the licence renewal application not being received by a licence holder due to various reasons, the most common being failing to notify this office of a change of address.

These reminders are sent after the date of expiry of the licence but before the end of the 14 day grace period for renewal.

Later this year you may also notice receiving a message when we receive your licence renewal form and when we order your new card. These messages will either come to you by SMS or email and are designed to improve communication through the process.

Please lodge your firearms licence renewal applications as soon as possible to avoid any additional cost and problems associated with licence expiry.

Reasons you may not receive electronic notifications:

- We have no record of your email or mobile phone number.
- You have renewed prior to licence expiry (this alleviates all the problems).

Club membership lists:

Thank you to the clubs that have already provided this office with a current list of members / updated committee details. If your club has not yet provided a current list of members, please provide this as soon as possible. The list should include the full name of members (not abbreviated), surname, DOB and firearms licence number. It would assist if you could note those members that are social members only (This reduces follow-up enquiries). To hold a genuine reason 1 endorsement (sport/target shooting), you must be a participating sport/target shooter.

Inexperienced/unlicensed persons at the range:

Just a reminder that an exemption granted to an unlicensed person for the purpose of sport or target shooting at a particular club for a period of six (6) months ***only***, authorises the exemption holder to possess a firearm and ammunition ***under immediate supervision on an approved range only for that purpose.***

Importantly, a person can shoot on the day that the application is first made but, not again until they receive the six-month exemption from the Commissioner of Police. To obtain the exemption the club should send the application form (including photo identification) to Firearms Services for processing within 14 days of receiving the application.

Club exemptions **are not** issued to people under 18 years of age. If it is club policy for exemption holders to make a contribution for the ammunition they use, please ensure that the exemption holder acquires only enough ammunition to use on the range on any particular day. That is, the exemption holder is not authorised to take unused ammunition away from the range.

Exchange of information forms:

As you are aware, a person who applies for a firearms licence endorsed for sport or target shooting of Category H firearms is required to complete an *Approval for the Exchange of Information between Approved Clubs and Tasmania Police*. The completed form provides the person's permission for Tasmania Police to release to a club office bearer any information that would affect their suitability to retain a firearms licence and any concerns relating to the person posing a danger if in possession of a firearm. The club is indemnified from civil or legal liability if they notify Police in good faith of those matters. There is a club exchange information form available from Firearms Services to assist with reporting this information, however a small number of copies have been included with this newsletter for your convenience.

Participation rate record cards (pistol only):

A quantity of participation rate cards has recently been sent to relevant clubs to pass on to their members. Compulsory shoots were required to be completed by **31 December 2020**. Please remind your members to submit their original and completed participation rate record cards to Firearms Services, they were due **31 January 2021**.

'Compulsory shoots' must be recorded on a participation record card and include competition matches as well as club-organised practice matches and club-organised social matches.

Below I repeat the instructions to clubs as outlined in my letter of July 2020.

Following requests from Sport and Target Shooting clubs the department reviewed the participation rate reporting requirements established under the *Firearms Act 1996* for Category H licence Sport and Target Shooters for 2020.

It is acknowledged that the impacts of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) have meant that in some cases Sport and Target Shooters would have been unable to comply with participation rate requirements. Further, requiring compliance with the requirements would have posed a risk to the health of any person that fits into a high-risk category if they were to contract COVID-19.

On that basis the Commissioner of Police established that the minimum required participation will be 3 shoots per sport or target shooting discipline. If a person is involved in more than one discipline, the requirement will be 2 shoots per additional discipline. The table below illustrates the 2020 requirements:

Number of disciplines	Number of shoots
1	3
2	5 (3+2)
3	7 (3 + 2 + 2)

Furthermore, for those that have previously demonstrated compliance with the usual participation requirements, action for not meeting requirements will be paused in 2021, meaning that the obligation to meet 2020 (adjusted) and 2021 (full) requirements will be monitored in early 2022. This provides Category H licence holders two years to meet the combined requirements for both 2020 and 2021. Licence holders should anticipate the return to full requirements for the 2021 year if there are no significant impacts from COVID-19 in 2021 in Tasmania.

If a particular licence holder was unable to complete any participation shoots during 2020 because they fell in to a 'high risk' category and have concerns in relation to catching up in 2021, they may write to Firearms Services in early 2021 asking that they be exempted from the requirements for 2020.

People considered to fit the criteria of 'higher risk' of serious illness from COVID-19 are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older, with one or more serious chronic medical conditions;
- people 65 years and older, with one or more serious chronic medical conditions;
- people 70 years and older;
- people with a compromised immune system.

Serious chronic medical conditions include heart disease and hypertension, lung disease including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cystic fibrosis, diabetes, cancer, renal failure and chronic liver disease. People may be requested to provide a medical certificate to evidence their serious chronic medical condition. However, it is not necessary to provide a certificate at the time of requesting exemption from 2020 participation requirements.

These requirements consider the impacts of COVID-19 to this point in time and provide some flexibility if there are further impacts into the future. However, the requirements will be continuously reviewed during the period that COVID-19 impacts Tasmania and may be further reduced in the future if Tasmania were to experience further periods of disruption as a result COVID-19.

Any members who are unable to complete the required pistol shoots in any given year must provide Firearms Services with a letter of explanation. If members cannot provide a valid reason why they cannot complete the compulsory pistol shoots in a calendar year, they will be unable to retain their endorsement (of H1).

I would appreciate your assistance in advising / reminding members of these requirements.

Change to Category H (Reason 6) application process

The Commissioner of Police has recently approved a change to the application process for Category H (Genuine Reason 6 – Business or Employment as a Security Agent or Security Guard) that will allow individuals to apply for a Category H firearms licence for employment and complete the required training course before providing proof of employment. The licence will still not be issued until proof of employment is provided.

The main benefits of the change are licence applicants will be able to seek employment after successfully completing their training and able to advise employers that their licence to carry a Category H firearm can be issued within two weeks if they provide a letter offering employment.

Ultimately this is a better approach for both job seekers and employers.

For more information:

Please visit the Firearms Services webpage on the Tasmania Police internet at <http://www.police.tas.gov.au/services-online/firearms/>.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish your Club and Committee a safe and happy 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Shepherd'.

Kerry Shepherd
MANAGER