

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website: <http://www.ama.com.au/>



Transcript: AMA President Dr Michael Gannon, Sky News, 4 January 2017

Subjects: Gun laws

HELEN DALLEY: Well, joining me now from Perth is AMA President Dr Michael Gannon. Dr Gannon, thanks very much. Are you qualified to put your bit into the gun debate?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, doctors are qualified to speak on any issue that affects the health of Australians, and it's doctors in emergency departments, in general practice, in surgical operating theatres, who pick up the pieces when gun violence happens.

HELEN DALLEY: Yes. Do you take offence at someone like Senator Leyonhjelm, who is a known gun advocate, saying that you should keep your nose out of this debate?

MICHAEL GANNON: Look, I'm familiar with a lot of Senator Leyonhjelm's commentary on the so-called nanny state, but the AMA will always forcefully advocate on things that prevent people getting sick. We've heard him speak out against 'nanny state' measures like vaccination, road safety. We will forcefully speak about anything that stops people ending up suffering the carnage that puts them in hospital emergency departments, on the operating table.

HELEN DALLEY: All right. What is it you are calling for now? You want a real-time national register. Now, what difference is that going to make?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, 20 years ago, out of the Port Arthur massacre, we saw some of the world's best gun laws. It required great courage from Prime Minister Howard at the time to get these laws through. Something that was called for at that time was a national register so that the State and Territory-based computer systems can talk to each other, so that we know exactly, where possible, where every firearm in the country is. This is 20 years overdue. It's time for the State and Territory governments to get their act together so that we can make sure, wherever possible, that lethal weapons aren't in the hands of people who shouldn't have them.

HELEN DALLEY: All right. So the gun owner has to be licensed, but you are saying the actual firearm needs to be registered on a proper register that gets updated constantly by the owner, or there should be penalties?

MICHAEL GANNON: Yes, and that would make it very similar to owning a motor vehicle - both the driver is independently licensed, and each individual vehicle is individually licenced. What we don't want is a position where a lethal weapon is in the hands of someone in whose hands it might be dangerous. So if someone has a restraining order against them, if their circumstances change, if someone has a criminal conviction, we want to know whether they have a gun licence and whether or not they have a weapon potentially at their fingertips.

HELEN DALLEY: All right. Now, doesn't the system that's there now try and get rid of people who might be - certainly have had a criminal conviction, and certainly might be under restraining orders?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, certainly, some of the State-based legislation is functioning well. Not for one minute is the AMA calling for guns to be removed from their proper use, for sporting shooters who want to use them, who keep their guns protected in gun safes. We

obviously recognise the role of guns for the police and the military, and their key role in the hands of farmers. This is all very important, but sadly what we know is that every year hundreds of people are killed by guns, thousands are injured by them inadvertently. This represents part of our broad preventive health agenda, just stopping lethal weapons getting into the hands of people who might do themselves or others harm.

HELEN DALLEY: All right. Now, in the 20-21 years since the Port Arthur massacre, and those gun laws you rightly point out Prime Minister Howard brought in that were very tough, we understand that gun deaths in Australia have pretty much halved. So again, what is the - I mean, we hear in the news and we read many stories in the news about guns being used on our streets, mainly in the hands of criminals, but what is the evidence that needs what you're asking for, these tougher restrictions?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, the gun laws introduced by the Howard Government in 1996-97 are an Australian success story. They've been referred to many times overseas, including in the United States. We want to see that preserved and built on. We want to see a system where the amount of gun-related violence is diminished. From time to time, there are advocates to relax these gun laws, there's a move in place to relax restrictions on the importation of the Adler shotgun. We don't want to see any of this fabulous bit of public policy unravelled in coming years.

HELEN DALLEY: All right. So are you concerned in particular by the political moves to, sort of, lessen the restrictions on guns like the Adler shotgun?

MICHAEL GANNON: Yeah, we are very concerned about that. We know that too many suicides, too many homicides, too many accidents happen because guns fall into the wrong hands. As I've stated before, not for one moment do we not recognise the importance of guns to running a farm, and the ability for people to go shooting for sport, but what we don't want is those guns falling into the wrong hands. We know that people act impulsively. If they've got a lethal weapon at their fingertips it's far more likely they'll harm themselves or someone else, sometimes a loved one.

HELEN DALLEY: All right. Dr Michael Gannon from the AMA, thanks for joining us.

MICHAEL GANNON: Pleasure, Helen.

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CONTACT: John Flannery
Maria Hawthorne

02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

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