

## Violent Crime Reduction Bill

- Contains provisions prohibiting the transfer of realistic imitation firearms, which are widely and commonly possessed by hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, who will face criminal sanction if they sell their guns to someone. This would be very hard to enforce, and in the past the Government has made little attempt to warn people of changes in the firearms law. (The maximum prison term in England & Wales for this offence will be 51 weeks.)
- Does not contain compensation for businesses engaged in the trade associated with “realistic imitation firearms” or for collectors (many of whom have collections worth considerable sums). There are probably 3,000 businesses engaged in this trade to a significant extent, many of whom will be forced out of business, others will be significantly curtailed. Without compensation, they will face significant economic hardship.
- Contains provisions to raise the age limit for possession of air guns to 18 (even though the age limit was raised under this Government only two years ago to 17).
- The previous ban on air-cartridge guns contained in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 is generally accepted to have been poorly complied with, and indeed at least one court has criticised the Government for failing to properly inform the public of the changes when a case involving the possession of such a firearm came before them.
- Provides no exemption from prohibition for realistic non-firing imitations of antique firearms, even though genuine antique firearms in working order are exempt from firearm controls.
- Introduces an age limit of 18 on imitation firearms that are not realistic, which will probably mean toy guns, water pistols, etc. can only be sold to adults.
- Increases the age limit from 16 to 18 on when knives and other similar sharp objects can be sold, which will mean for example that people under 18 working in trades involving the use of a knife cannot acquire them.
- This Government has enacted a wide variety of firearm controls since coming to power, yet none of them have had the effect touted for them at the time. Given the huge number of imitation firearms in circulation already, it seems unlikely this Bill will have the effect the Government claims. It is notable that most “realistic imitation firearms” are made in Japan and intended for their domestic market – and Japan has a lower rate of violent crime than the UK. (Imitation firearms were used in 1,815 offences in the year 2002/03, however, this figure is not considered to be entirely reliable by the Home Office as it depends on victim identification to some degree.)