

Submission in support of Petition 130 – Airsoft

This submission is made in response to the request of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs regarding Petition 130 – Airsoft dated 17 October 2019.

Overview of the sport of Airsoft

Airsoft is a shooting sport similar to Paintball that originated in Japan in the early 1980's. The primary differences between Paintball and Airsoft originate from the projectiles they use: paintballs are significantly bigger and heavier (3.2 grams and 17 mm diameter) than airsoft BBs (less than 0.5 grams and 6 mm diameter). These differences makes Airsoft a lot safer and cheaper than Paintball:

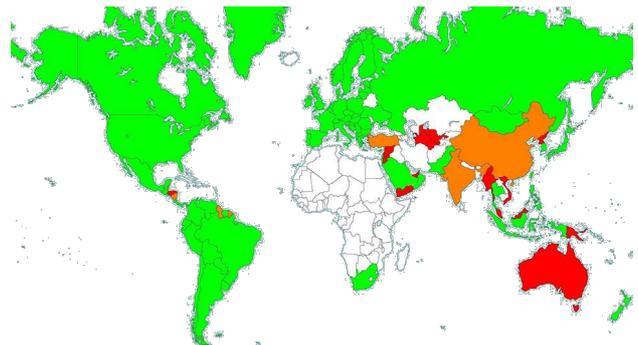
- Safer (about 10 times): the energy carried by an Airsoft BB ranges between 1 and 2.3 Joules; Paintballs carry an energy, when fired, of over 17 Joules. The intrinsic energy and ballistic properties of an Airsoft BB makes it very difficult to penetrate skin, even at close range. There are several ballistic reports supporting this statement that can be made available upon request;
- Cheaper (about 3-4 times): Due to their heavy weight paintballs require a high pressure air source to propel them; whilst Airsoft BBs can be shot by a spring powered mechanism engaged by an electric motor. This, together with the ease of manufacturing BBs (i.e. plastic moulded pellets) makes Airsoft significantly cheaper.

Based on the above, although “younger” than Paintball, the sport of Airsoft is far more popular worldwide.

Legal status

Airsoft is enjoyed worldwide, with varying degrees of regulatory requirements, with only a few countries not allowing the sport: Australia, Syria, North Korea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Honduras, Papua New Guinea and Malaysia. Recently even China allowed Airsoft in club environments. Except for Australia, there is no other western democratic country in the world to have banned Airsoft.

The attached map represents the legal status of the sport of Airsoft around the world (Green – legal; Orange – semi-legal or not enforced; Red – illegal; White – unknown) [Ref: *Western Australia Airsoft Club Inc.*].



Airsoft devices were initially banned in Australia in 1996 (at the Federal level) by restricting their importation through the *Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956* by then Minister for Justice Senator Vanstone: "*Many of the pistols look so real they could be used as de facto weapons in robberies. In the wrong hands, [they] have the potential to cause a lot of fear on the streets*". This seems to have been an emotional, knee-jerk reaction with no evidence base. Furthermore, the industry at the time was never consulted and some indicate that the decision was an afterthought to the National Firearms Agreement (NFA). Nevertheless, the NFA was designed to prevent mass shootings, not prohibit non-lethal sports such as paintball, Airsoft and others similar activities.

There is no State or Territory legislation prohibiting Airsoft. Recently, the WA Law Reform Commission recommended Airsoft to be legalised (Project 105, October 2016) and Hon. Aaron

Stonehouse MLC introduced the *Firearms Amendment (Airsoft) Bill 2019* to regulate and allow the sport of Airsoft in Western Australia.

The risks associated with the sport of Airsoft

One of the obvious risks associated with any activity involving projectiles is the risk of injury. However, in the sport's 40 year lifetime there has been no recorded death. The same cannot be said about paintball or many other sports or outdoor activities. Furthermore, there are several ballistic reports showing the reduced risk of an Airsoft BB penetrating the skin. Eye protection is commonly the only mandatory requirement to manage the risk of injury.

Another risk raised by law makers in Australia is that Airsoft devices can be used in crime, based on their appearance which imitates real firearms. However, imitation firearms are and have been freely available in Western Australia to anyone over the age of 18 [*Weapons Regulations 1999*]. There is little to no evidence to show that they have been used in crime or pose a public risk.

Recently Gel Blasters (of similar appearance and functioning as Airsoft markers) have been allowed for importation in Queensland. This has also seen them flourish in Western Australia, with games seeing over 50 players taking place every weekend in Perth. WA Police has taken a very tolerant approach to them (unless brandished in public), returning them to their owners following inspection.

Why we want Airsoft in Western Australia

- Mateship (our Australian pride): often we hear stories and see hero and team based action movies portraying acts of valour and sacrifice, friendships beyond words, teamwork, suspense, courage and fear. We wish to experience all of these feelings in a safe environment together with our friends. This is what Airsoft offer us;
- Safer, cheaper more convenient than paintball: the energy of a shooting Airsoft BB is 10 times lower than a shooting paintball, (hurts a lot less); the sport is also about 3.5 - 4 times cheaper, mostly due to the lower cost of BBs;
- Cosplay, escapism and LARP: The sport of Airsoft is not about military simulations or anti-social activities. On the contrary, it is a very social activity aimed at fun and stress relief. This has also been substantiated by Tasmania in their 2015 review of the *Firearms Act*, by removing paintball from the definition of "war game";
- Physical fitness, stress relief and enjoying the outdoors with friends and family;
- Tinkering: Airsoft markers are complex devices, encompassing mechanical, electrical, pneumatic and electronic components. Repairing and tuning them can be challenging, rewarding and great fun.

I sincerely hope you will be able to see the sport of Airsoft for what it is (i.e. friends enjoying themselves in an active outdoors activity) and support its development in Western Australia. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me

Yours sincerely,



Laurentiu Zamfirescu