



OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATES 'ABUSE' CLAIM

The State Ombudsman has been asked to investigate the treatment of shooters at the handgun buyback.

Combined Firearms Council of Victoria President, Sebastian Ziccone said making shooters wait for between five and eight hours to surrender handguns, was a form of abuse.

"In most cases, these shooters were forced to wait outdoors in the wet and cold, in some instances up to 4am," he said.

Some in the queue were elderly and frail, and there have been serious health, safety and security concerns.

Mr Ziccone rejected claims that shooters 'rushed' the buyback centre on the first day.

"The problem was not the number of shooters there, but the time it took to be processed. The average time was 15 minutes and even if you accept that Friday was an unusually busy day, this does not excuse waits of at least 5 hours on the other days the buyback centre was open" he said.

"Making people wait in the cold and wet for this long is not acceptable."

"It is not as though these are teenagers waiting to get into a rock concert."

However Mr Ziccone said the problem was not with Police at the buyback centre, but the way it was organised.

"The police at the buyback centre were fantastic. They did the best they could," he said.

"We have heard both Superintendent Dettmann and Police Minister Haermeyer say how well the buyback was going. However they are wrong."

"Some people have travelled significant distances and are turning back home with banned handguns. It is easy to understand why they could lose confidence in a process that the Government had over six months to get right."

"The only way to shorten the wait under these circumstances is to ask shooters not to turn up."

"Either that or guarantee an absolutely minimal wait and turn around time."

Mr Ziccone said he has asked the Ombudsman to direct Police to guarantee that handgun owners be processed within 15 minutes of arrival at a buyback centre, or that the buyback program be deferred until the guarantee can be provided. The next buyback is due to start this week in Warrnambool.

"Postponing the buyback would create issues under the Firearms Act, but nothing that cannot be fixed in the Spring Session of Parliament," he said.

For more information, phone Sebastian Ziccone, (edited)