



**Australian Government**

**Australian Institute of Criminology**

# Firearm theft in Australia 2007–08

Samantha Bricknell

**AIC** Reports  
Monitoring  
Reports **08**



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# Foreword

The National Firearm Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP) was established at the Australian Institute of Criminology to monitor the number of firearms reported stolen in Australian states and territories and to examine the nature and characteristics of these thefts. This report represents the fourth in the NFTMP series and illustrates a consistency in the pattern of firearm thefts across Australia between 2004–05 and 2007–08. The total number of firearms reported stolen has remained below 2,000 during this period, with a noticeable increase occurring only in the most recent year. A total of 1,712 firearms, from 708 individual theft incidents, were reported stolen to police during 2007–08. Most of these thefts, as with previous years, netted one or two firearms apiece and were taken primarily from private residential premises, either from rooms within the residence or from sheds or garages. Rifles again proved to be the most common type of firearm stolen, followed by shotguns and Category A and B firearms predominated in the stolen pool. The majority of these firearms were registered at the time of their theft and most owners reporting a theft held the mandatory licence for the firearms reported stolen. Nonetheless, many owners continued to demonstrate carelessness or negligence in securing unattended firearms, leaving them in unlocked or easily penetrated storage arrangements or making no perceived effort to conceal or safeguard the firearm at all.

The fate of stolen firearms remains largely unclear, although some are certainly diverted into the illegal market. Data collated for the NFTMP described a steady 12 to 13 percent recovery rate for stolen firearms in each of the years considered. This means that by the end of each reporting period, upwards of 1,200 firearms remained unaccounted for. Some of these firearms are undoubtedly retrieved at a later stage, but others are known to have been used to commit subsequent criminal offences such as murder, attempted murder and armed robbery, or are used in suicide attempts. Overall, an average three percent of reported firearm thefts involved firearms subsequently known to have been used in crime (or sudden death) or were found in possession of known offenders. The real proportion, however, is likely to be somewhat higher.

The purpose of the NFTMP is two-fold: to assist both law enforcement and policymakers in the development of initiatives to reduce the incidence of firearm theft, as well as to provide data by which minimum standards for firearm storage can be further addressed. The detail and reliability of the NFTMP monitoring data supplied by state and territory police, and the consistent nature of the findings, presents a stable platform on which such decisions can be made.

**Adam Tomison**  
**Director**



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The research is funded by the Australian Government under the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002*.



# Executive summary

This report presents information on all incidents of firearm theft reported to police in Australian states and territories for the period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008.

## Key findings regarding stolen firearms

- A total of 1,712 firearms were stolen in 708 reported incidents of firearm theft in 2007–08;
- Fifty-two percent of incidents involved the theft of two or more firearms. The number of firearms stolen in multiple-firearm theft ranged from two to 55;
- Rifles accounted for the majority (55%) of all reported stolen firearms. Shotguns comprised 24 percent of stolen firearms, handguns nine percent and air rifles constituted seven percent;
- Six in 10 stolen firearms were classified as a category A firearm and one-quarter as a category B firearm. Nine percent of reported stolen firearms were category H and one percent or fewer were in the most restricted categories of firearm ie category C and D respectively; and
- Ninety-five percent of firearms reported stolen were registered, the majority of which were registered to a private owner. Most (71%) of the unregistered stolen firearms were category A firearms.

## Key findings regarding firearm owners

- Ninety-two percent of firearm owners who reported a theft in 2007–08 held a valid firearm licence for the firearms they reported stolen;
- Firearm owners (excluding those who reported a theft in Western Australia) held an average of 1.7 firearm licences; and
- Three-quarters of firearm thefts were reported by the owner of the stolen firearms (excluding Western Australia).

## Key findings regarding theft incidents

- Forty percent of firearm thefts were reported on the day the theft was discovered and 22 percent the following day (excluding Western Australia);
- The majority of thefts (87%) followed an unlawful entry of premises or a vehicle;
- Private residential premises were the primary target for firearm theft (75% of all thefts). More than 80 percent of rifles, shotguns and air rifles were stolen from this location;
- Thefts from business premises accounted for 10 percent of all reported firearm thefts and thefts from vehicles accounted for nine percent;
- Just over 50 percent of thefts (excluding those in Western Australia) were classified as general burglaries, in that other items were stolen alongside the firearms. Cash was stolen in 24 percent of such incidents, tools in 22 percent and home entertainment equipment (eg flatscreen televisions, DVD players) in 21 percent; and

- Ammunition was stolen in one-quarter of incidents of firearm theft.

## Key findings regarding firearm storage, compliance and prosecution of firearm owners

- In 57 percent of incidents, firearms stolen had been stored in a firearm safe or otherwise approved receptacle;
- Rates of storage compliance among firearm owners remained consistent with rates from previous years—56 percent compliance in 2007–08. Owners were considered non-compliant if receptacles were unlocked or unapproved or firearms had been left in vehicles or unsecured;
- One-quarter of firearm owners were again found to be in breach of firearm laws and regulations. Sixty-three percent of these owners subsequently faced charges or disciplinary action but 33 percent faced no formal reprimand; and
- Six in 10 charges brought against firearm owners related to the offence of failing to secure a firearm (excluding Western Australia), 13 percent to unlawful possession of a firearm and five percent to possessing an unregistered firearm.

## Key findings on related issues

- Firearms were recovered from 13 percent of thefts (excluding Western Australia) and were returned to owners in 41 percent of these cases;
- Police apprehended and initiated proceedings against offenders involved in 14 percent of reported firearm thefts (excluding Western Australia). Seventy-three percent of these offenders had committed a general burglary;
- Four percent of theft locations (excluding Western Australia) had been the site of previous firearm thefts. All long-arms (ie rifles, shotguns) were stolen following a 'break and enter' while all handguns were taken during armed robberies; and
- Firearms stolen in just seven (or 2% of) firearm-theft incidents (excluding Western Australia) were known to have been used in the commission of a subsequent offence. These included an attempted murder, a home invasion and 'multiple' armed robberies.



# Introduction

Since 1996, Australian firearms laws have undergone major amendments, primarily in line with the National Firearms Agreement, the National Handgun Control Agreement 2002 and the National Firearms Trafficking Policy Agreement 2002. The purpose of these agreements was to prohibit and/or restrict certain types of firearms; establish new firearm licensing, registration, storage and training requirements; and introduce new penalties for the trafficking of firearms. Each Australian state and territory has its own, comparable suite of firearms laws and regulation, with state and territory police responsible for maintaining firearm registries with respect to licensing (of firearms owners) and registration (of firearms), as well as ensuring firearm owners abide by the laws with respect to firearm ownership, use and storage.

## About the National Firearms Theft Monitoring Program

The National Firearms Theft Monitoring Program (NFTMP) was established at the AIC following recommendation from the Firearms Policy Working Group to the then Australasian Police Ministers Council that there be longer-term monitoring of reported firearms thefts in Australia. The NFTMP

compiles financial year data provided by Australian state and territory police services on:

- characteristics of reported stolen firearms (serial number, registration status, firearm type and category, and make, model, calibre and action type);
- storage arrangements for firearms at the time of theft;
- method by which the firearms were stolen;
- recovery rate of stolen firearms;
- apprehension and prosecution of offenders; and
- known use of stolen firearms to commit subsequent crimes.

Findings from the NFTMP are used to assist the Firearms Policy Working Group in developing initiatives to reduce the incidence of firearms theft and to present information on the status of, and any observed changes in, firearm storage arrangements and compliance. The latter is to be used to construct measures to both improve storage compliance and develop a minimum standard of firearm storage for application to all sectors of the firearm-owning community.

The NFTMP is funded by the Australian Government under the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002*, for a period of four years and starting 1 July 2006. This report represents the fourth published in the four-year

funded series (see Borzycki & Mouzos 2007 for thefts reported in 2004–05, Bricknell & Mouzos 2007 for thefts reported in 2005–06 and Bricknell 2008 for thefts reported in 2006–07) and builds on earlier work prepared by the AIC on firearm theft (eg Borzycki & Mouzos 2007; Mouzos 2002; Mouzos & Sakurai 2006).

## Methods and data quality

Firearm theft data for the period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 were supplied by state and territory police, using a purpose-designed template. Western Australia, however, was unable to provide the full complement of data this year, instead providing data on a subset of variables as listed below:

- number of stolen firearms per incident;
- type, category and calibre of stolen firearm;
- licence status of firearm owner;
- location of theft;
- storage arrangements for firearm(s) at time of theft;
- storage compliance; and
- prosecution for firearm offences.

The original dataset comprised 739 cases of theft for a total of 1,758 reported stolen firearms. One case was removed as it did not refer to a genuine incident of theft, that is, the firearm owner remembered where he had left his firearm and subsequently reported its retrieval to the police. Another case referred to an incident in which the police believed the victim had contrived the theft (and even ownership of the firearm purported to have been stolen) but with no evidence to prove otherwise, this case was retained in the dataset.

Another 30 cases were removed as they described incidents of theft in which the firearms stolen were not categorised as firearms for the purposes of the report. These cases referred to the theft of 43 firearms that were classified as either:

- replicas, imitations or toy guns, or starter pistols (and where the firearm owner was not found in breach of firearms legislation); or
- antique, deactivated or inoperable.

In past reports, thefts of paintball markers were also discarded but are retained here because of an increase in the number of thefts of this kind of firearm in 2007–08. Two additional cases reported the theft of both firearms and ‘non-firearms’ (as defined by the aforementioned criteria); these were retained in the dataset but the ‘non-firearms’ (two replica pistols) were excluded from the analysis.

The final dataset comprises valid records for 708 incidents of theft, from which 1,712 firearms were reported stolen. Each record represents a single incident of theft, 52 percent of which resulted in the theft of more than one firearm.

Prior to analysis, state and territory data was cleaned and interrogated using logic checks to denote inconsistencies. Missing data again tended to be a relatively minor problem but the proportion of unknown responses remained substantial for some variables. Factors potentially contributing to a higher incidence of unknown returns include:

- the inability or reluctance of the person reporting the theft to relay specifics about the event or the firearms stolen;
- delayed reporting; and
- incomplete incident reports.

Care must be taken when interpreting data presented in this report, specifically that relating to the smaller jurisdictions of Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. These jurisdictions experience only a small number of firearms thefts each year and correspondingly, small changes in numbers can produce apparently significant, but not necessarily real, differences between years. Where numbers are particularly small, these will be removed from figures and tables and any accompanying text.

The data presented in this report represents only those incidents of theft reported to police. Not every victim of crime reports the incident to police and hence, not every incident of firearm theft that occurred within the 2007–08 period is necessarily captured in the dataset. Those owners who illegally own firearms, either because they are unlicensed and/or their firearms were not registered at the time of the theft, are least likely to report a theft because of the risk of being ‘discovered’ and consequently

prosecuted for firearms offences. Owners who were knowingly negligent regarding the securing of their firearms may also be less inclined to report a theft, again because of risk of sanction. Finally, owners might not feel compelled to report the theft if their firearm was old, inoperable or of negligible value.

# Characteristics of stolen firearms

## Incidence of firearm theft

A total of 708 incidents of firearm theft were reported to state and territory police from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 (Table 1). From these incidents, a total of 1,712 firearms were reported stolen. As found for previous years, around one-quarter (26%) of all reported thefts occurred in New South Wales and one-fifth each in Western Australia (20%), Queensland (19%) and Victoria (19%). Just under one-quarter of firearms reported stolen were taken in New South Wales (24%, n=410), with another 21 percent (n=353) stolen in Queensland and

19 percent (n=332) in Victoria. An average 2.4 (median of 2) firearms were stolen in each incident.

Data on the total number of registered firearms was not available for 2007–08, but in 2006–07, there were around 2.6 million known registered firearms. Previous reports found that the proportional breakdown of thefts across Australia's states and territories generally correlated with the proportional breakdown of registered firearms. For example, in 2006–07, reported stolen firearms in New South Wales represented 24 percent of all reported stolen firearms; the number of registered firearms

**Table 1** Firearm theft incidents and number of stolen firearms

	Incidents		Number of stolen firearms		Mean number of firearms	Median number of firearms
	n	%	n	%		
NSW	187	26	410	24	2.2	2
Vic	133	19	332	19	2.5	3
Qld	131	19	352	21	2.7	3
WA	140	20	297	17	2.1	2
SA	70	10	193	11	2.8	3
Tas	37	5	107	6	2.9	4
ACT	6	1	9	1	1.5	2
NT	4	1	12	1	3.0	3
Australia	708	100	1,712	100	2.4	2

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]



represented 27 percent of all registered firearms in Australia.

The number of thefts reported in 2007–08 reverses the downward trend of previous years where incidents of theft dropped from 668 in 2004–05 to 626 in 2005–06. Similarly, the total number of reported stolen firearms, 1,712 in 2007–08, represents a considerable increase on the 1,526 reported stolen in 2006–07, although much less than the estimated average of 4,195 firearms reported stolen each year from 1994 to 2000 (Table 2). The decline in thefts between the two decades is largely attributable to legal requirements prescribing storage and safekeeping of firearms which were introduced into state and territory firearms legislation following the 1996 National Firearms Agreement.

No one jurisdiction has shown a consistent decline (or increase) in the annual number of firearms stolen over the observed period, although South Australia has sustained a theft rate of around 200 firearms per year since the high of 250 firearms reported stolen in 2004–05. Other jurisdictions have displayed more variable rates of theft in the intervening years. The large increase observed in 2007–08 can be attributed to a considerably larger number of firearms reported stolen in Western Australia (a difference of 65 firearms from 2006–07), Victoria

(56) and Tasmania (55). Queensland also recorded an increase (of 32 firearms) but numbers in this state were ‘artificially’ elevated by the fact that one incident alone resulted in the theft of 55 firearms.

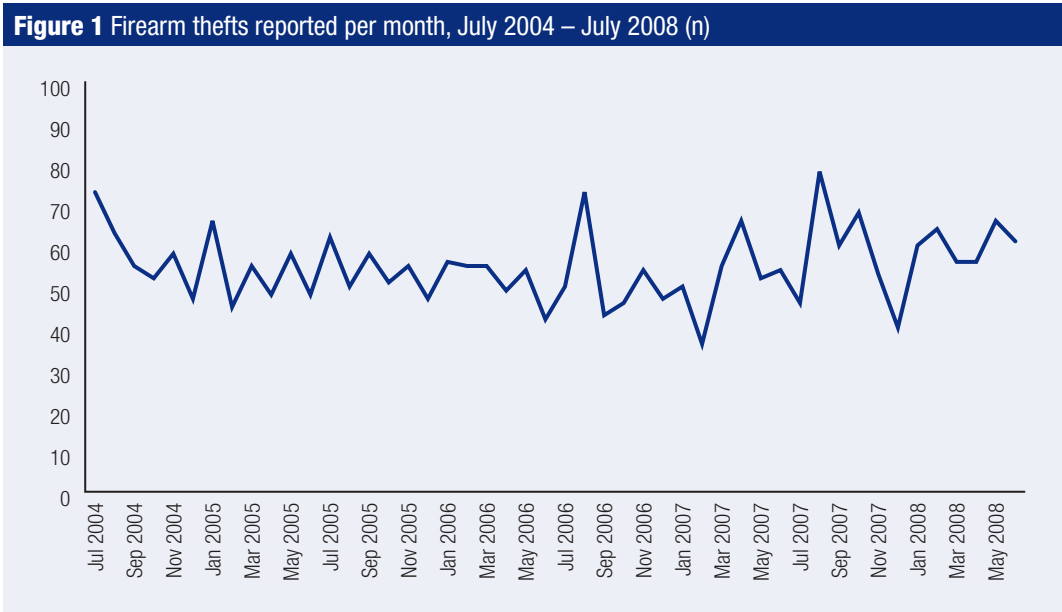
Table 2 Trend in stolen firearms 1994–2000 to 2007–08 (number stolen per year)					
	1994–2000 <sup>a</sup>	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
NSW	1,048	371	401	432	410
Vic	538	302	211	276	332
Qld	750	329	302	320	352
WA	602	207	191	232	297
SA	823	250	198	204	193
Tas	306	83	114	52	107
ACT	36	8	9	na	9
NT	92	20	19	10	12
Australia	4,195	1,470	1,445	1,526 <sup>b</sup>	1,712

a: Average

b: Excludes ACT

Sources: Mouzos 2002; AIC NFTMP 2004–08 [computer file]

Figure 1 depicts the pattern of firearm thefts reported from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2008. The distribution of thefts was relatively uniform from early 2005 to mid-2006, but began to fluctuate more overtly from then on. On average, 55 incidents



Source: AIC NFTMP 2004–08 [computer file]

of firearm theft were reported each month during the 48 month period. The lowest number of incidents was 36 (in February 2007) and the highest was 78 (in August 2007).

Less than half (48%) of all incidents in 2007–08 involved the theft of a single firearm (Table 3). Only in two jurisdictions did single-firearm thefts predominate (67% in the Australian Capital Territory) or account for the majority of thefts (53% in Western Australia). A similar preponderance of multiple-firearm thefts was recorded in 2006–07, in contrast with the larger proportion of single-firearm thefts that occurred in 2005–06.

## Describing stolen firearms

### *Type of firearms stolen*

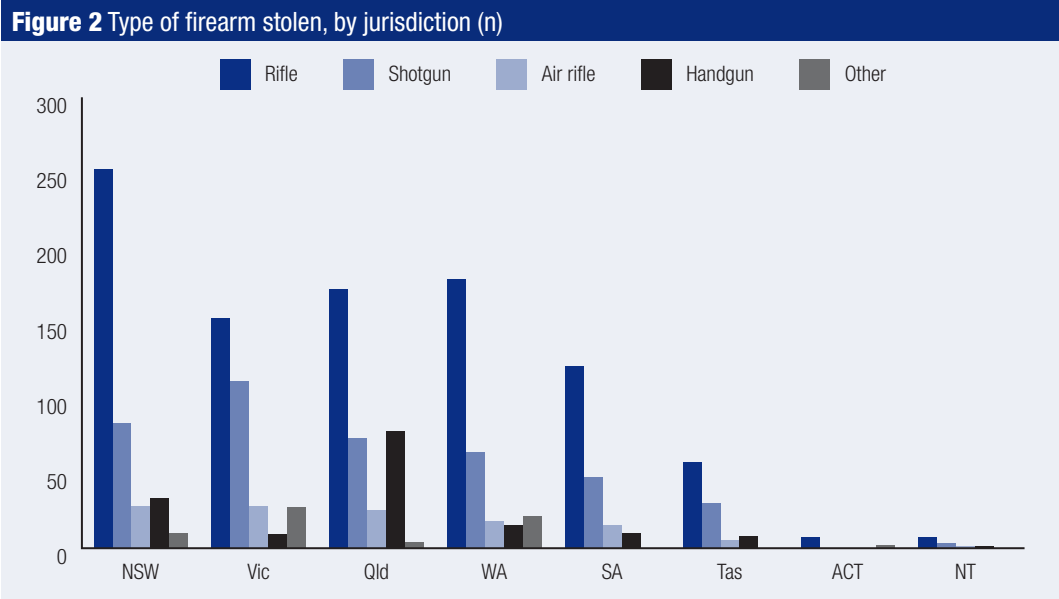
Fifty-five percent of firearms stolen in 2007–08 were rifles, 24 percent were shotguns, nine percent handguns and seven percent were air rifles (Table 4). The breakdown of stolen firearms by firearm type compares with that reported for the previous three years. Just under three-quarters of all incidents (72%) resulted in the theft of at least one rifle, 42 percent in the theft of a shotgun and seven percent in the theft of a handgun.

Table 3 Single versus multiple firearm thefts			
	Single-firearm thefts (n)	Multiple-firearm thefts (n)	Single-firearm thefts (%)
NSW	84	103	45
Vic	64	69	48
Qld	65	66	50
WA	74	66	53
SA	31	39	44
Tas	19	18	51
ACT	4	2	67
NT	1	3	25
Australia	342	366	48

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

Table 4 Type of firearm stolen		
	n	%
Rifle	948	55
Shotgun	413	24
Air rifle	126	7
Handgun	154	9
Other	64	4
Unknown	7	1
Total	1,712	100

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]



Note: Excludes firearms in which firearm type was unknown (n=7)

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]; Table 37

Rifles were the predominant firearm type stolen in each jurisdiction, ranging from 46 percent of all firearms reported stolen in Victoria to 77 percent in the Australian Capital Territory (Figure 2). Shotguns made up around one-fifth of reported stolen firearms in New South Wales and Queensland, and up to 33 percent in Victoria. Victoria has consistently reported a higher proportion of stolen shotguns, probably reflecting the higher rate of shotgun ownership in that state compared with other jurisdictions. Variation existed again between the jurisdictions in handgun theft but with the exception of Queensland, handguns represented less than 10 percent of all firearms reported stolen. In contrast, Queensland recorded handguns as comprising 22 percent of all stolen firearms but this high proportion relates to the previously mentioned single incident theft (from a dealer) of 55 firearms, of which 46 were handguns.

Data on the action type of firearms stolen in 2007–08 was not as complete as in previous years, with very large unknown returns. For this reason, percentages calculated in Tables 5, 6 and 7 exclude firearms of unknown action types and should not be compared with results described in previous reports. Four-fifths (81%) of known stolen rifles types were bolt action rifles and 13 percent were lever action rifles (Table 5). The majority of known stolen shotgun types were double barrel (34%), single barrel (30%) or over and under shotguns (28%; Table 6). Known handgun types were mostly semi-automatic pistols (43%) or revolvers (39%; Table 7).

Table 5 Action type of stolen rifles		
	n	%
Bolt action rifle	576	81
Lever action rifle	91	13
Pump action rifle	22	3
Single shot rifle	16	2
Semi-automatic rifle	3	<1
Other	2	<1
Total	710	100

Note: Excludes rifles in which action type was unknown (n=238)  
Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

Table 6 Action type of stolen shotguns		
	n	%
Double barrel shotgun	66	34
Single barrel shotgun	59	30
Over and under shotgun	55	28
Pump action shotgun	8	4
Bolt action shotguns	5	3
Semi-automatic shotgun	2	1
Lever action shotgun	1	<1
Total	196	100

Note: Excludes shotguns in which action type was unknown (n=216) or recorded as not applicable (n=1)  
Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

Table 7 Action type of stolen handguns		
	n	%
Semi-automatic pistols	59	43
Revolvers	54	39
Air pistols	19	14
Black powder revolvers	5	4
Single shot pistol	1	1
Total	138	100

Note: Excludes handguns in which action type was unknown (n=16)  
Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

### Category of stolen firearms

For registration and licensing purposes, firearms in Australia are categorised according to a classification system based on firing action, calibre and other criteria. Each jurisdiction recognises five primary categories—A, B, C, D and H—although some have created additional categories for specific firearms (eg paintball markers; see Appendix B for description of generic categories). Categories A and B firearms are the most commonly registered firearms in Australia and may be owned for a range of sporting, recreational (primarily hunting) and occupational purposes. Categories C and D firearms are restricted firearms and are only used for a limited range of sporting (eg clay target shooting: category C), occupational (eg animal control) and official purposes. Category H firearms are exclusively handguns and are also restricted; they may be acquired for specific sporting and occupational purposes. As in previous years, the majority of

firearms stolen in 2007–08 were category A (62%) and category B (24%; Table 8). Nine percent were category H and just one percent was category C. Only six category D firearms were reported stolen in 2007–08, representing less than one percent of all reported stolen firearms.

Table 8 Category of stolen firearms		
	n	%
A	1,051	62
B	404	24
C	25	1
D	6	<1
H	154	9
Other	22	1
Unknown <sup>a</sup>	45	3
Total	1,707	100

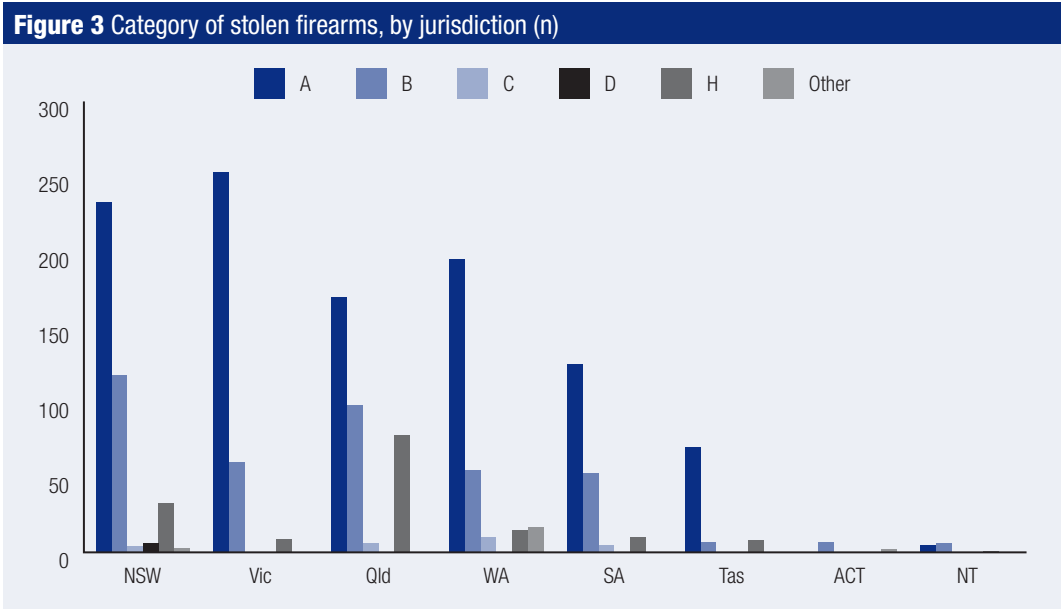
a: Includes firearms about which insufficient information was available to ascertain category  
 Note: Excludes firearms in which category was recorded as not applicable (n=5)  
 Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

There was some variation between jurisdictions in the categories of firearms stolen (Figure 3; Table 38).

Victoria recorded a much higher rate of category A firearm theft than the national average (79% compared to 63%) and Queensland a much lower rate (48%). No real difference was found for category B firearms, except for the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. The proportion of reported stolen category H firearms was highest in Queensland (22%). Category C firearms comprised three percent of all reported stolen firearms in Western Australia and South Australia, and two percent in Queensland.

### Registration status of stolen firearms

Nine out of 10 (92%) firearms reported stolen in 2007–08 were registered to a private owner, with another three percent registered to a firearms dealer (Table 9). Three percent were not registered at the time of the theft, slightly lower than the five percent recorded in 2006–07. Ninety-five percent or more of firearms stolen in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory were registered to a private owner at the time of theft (Table 10). Over two-thirds (71%) of unregistered firearms were category A firearms (Table 11).



Note: Excludes 45 firearms about which insufficient information was available to ascertain category  
 Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]; Table 38

**Table 9** Registration status of stolen firearms

	n	%
Registered <sup>a</sup>	1,578	92
Dealer stock <sup>b</sup>	52	3
Not registered	57	3
Unknown	21	1
Total	1,708	100

a: Registered to private owner

b: Registered to dealer

Note: Excludes four firearms whose registration status was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 10** Registration status of stolen firearms, by jurisdiction<sup>a</sup>

	Registered <sup>b</sup>		Not registered	
	n	%	n	%
NSW	372	91	21	5
Vic	318	96	8	2
Qld	282	80	14	4
WA	294	99	3	1
SA	191	99	0	0
Tas	102	95	5	5
ACT	7	78	1	11
NT	12	100	0	0

a: Percentages of all firearms reported stolen in that jurisdiction (ie including stolen firearms registered to dealers or whose registration was unknown or not applicable). Percentages in table rows will therefore not total 100

b: Registered to private owner

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 11** Category of stolen firearms by registration status

	Registered		Not registered	
	n	%	n	%
A	1,015	66	25	71
B	386	25	6	17
C	23	2	2	6
D	2	0	0	0
H	106	7	2	6
Total	1,532	100	35	100

Note: Excludes 145 firearms that were dealer stock or of unknown or not applicable registration status, or whose category information was unknown or not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 12** Firearm licence holders

	n	%
Licensed	649	92
Not licensed	44	6
Unknown	12	2
Not applicable	3	<1
Total	708	100

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

## Firearm licence holders

The majority of firearm owners (92%) who reported the theft of firearms in 2007–08 held the appropriate licence(s) for the firearms they reported stolen (Table 12). Excluding the Australian Capital Territory

**Table 13** Licence holders by jurisdiction

	Licensed		Unlicensed		Total (n)	% of all firearm owners
	n	%	n	%		
NSW	162	92	15	8	177	95
Vic	121	92	10	8	131	98
Qld	116	90	13	10	129	98
WA	139	100	0	0	139	99
SA	70	100	0	0	70	100
Tas	32	86	5	14	37	100
ACT	5	83	1	17	6	100
NT	4	100	0	0	4	100

Note: Excludes 15 firearms in which the licence status of the firearm owner was unknown or not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

and Northern Territory, where the number of theft incidents were low, the percentage of licensed owners ranged from 86 percent in Tasmania to 100 percent in Western Australia and South Australia (Table 13). Fourteen percent of firearm owners in Tasmania who reported the theft of firearms did not hold a relevant licence, nor did 10 percent of owners in Queensland.

A total of 984 firearm licenses were owned by the 568 recorded firearm owners in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Each owner held an average of 1.7 licences each. Overall, just under half (47%) of all licences owned were for a category A firearm, 41 percent for a category B, five percent each for categories C and H, three percent for other category firearms (mostly

paintball markers) and one percent for a category D firearm (Table 14). Eight in 10 (82%) owners reporting a firearm theft in 2007–09 held a category A licence and 70 percent held a category B licence.

Table 14 Type of firearm licence held			
	n	% of firearm owners	% of licenses held
A	465	82	47
B	399	70	41
C	45	8	5
D	5	1	1
H	45	8	5
Other	25	4	3
Total	984	—	100

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)



# The nature of firearm theft incidents

## Reporting firearm thefts

Ninety-two percent of firearm thefts reported from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 (excluding those which were reported in Western Australia) took place within this 12 month period. Of the 42 thefts committed before 1 July 2007, 45 percent (n=19) occurred in 2006–07 and 31 percent (n=13) two years before that. The oldest thefts dated back to the 1990s.

Owners of registered firearms are required to notify police of lost or stolen firearms within a specified time period following discovery of the theft. The period of notification varies between jurisdictions, from 24 hours in Victoria and Tasmania to a maximum of 14 days (in writing) in South Australia. In 2007–08, 40 percent of thefts were reported on the day the incident was discovered and another 22 percent the following day (Table 15). Reporting rates in different jurisdictions conformed more or less to this pattern; 54 percent or more reports were filed on the day or within a day of the discovery of the theft (Figure 4). One-fifth of reports in Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania were delayed by two weeks or more. Delayed reporting generally arose when owners were temporarily away or because firearms were inspected only intermittently, either because they were infrequently used or stored in a location away from the owners' usual place of residence.

**Table 15** Period between incident date and report date

	n	%
0 (the day of the incident)	227	40
1 day	122	22
2 to 7 days	92	16
8 to 14 days	30	5
More than 2 weeks	97	17
Total	568	100

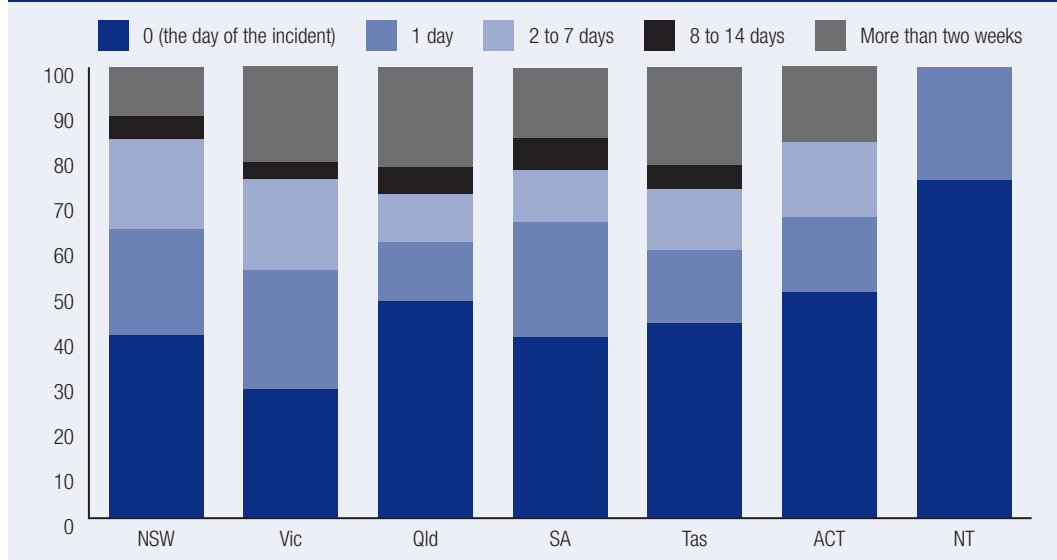
Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

## *Persons reporting firearm thefts*

Three-quarters of firearms thefts were reported by owners of registered firearms (Table 16). In a very small number of incidents (n=6 or 1%), the owner reported the theft of both registered and unregistered firearms. Only one of these six owners was recorded as being in breach of firearms regulations and subsequently charged.

Seventeen thefts (or 3% of all reported thefts) were reported by owners of unregistered firearms. Possession of an unregistered firearm is a recognised offence in all Australian states and territories and probably precludes a larger proportion of similar owners reporting firearm theft to the police. Nine of these 17 owners were known to have

**Figure 4** Period between incident date and report date, by jurisdiction (%)



Note: Total number of thefts recorded for Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory are small compared to other jurisdictions and these data should hence be treated with caution

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia); Table 39

breached firearms regulations, with five charged or having charges pending. No reason was provided as to why the remaining four unregistered owners did not receive disciplinary action.

**Table 16** Persons who reported firearm theft to police

	n	%
Registered owner of firearm	429	76
Owner of unregistered firearm	17	3
Owner of premises	21	4
Occupier of premises	21	4
Another licensed person	29	5
Police initiated inquiry	6	1
Unknown	3	1
Other	42	7
Relative	17	3
Neighbour	4	1
Employee	9	2
Other	12	2
Total	568	100

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

## Circumstances of the theft

An unlawful entry to a building or vehicle (otherwise known as breaking and entering) continues to be the predominant mode for the theft of firearms (87% of all reported thefts; Table 17). Other forms of theft comprised less than five percent of all thefts reported in 2007–08. Armed robberies, which made up three percent of all reported firearm thefts, mostly targeted armoured security vehicles during cash drops, where security guards' handguns were stolen along with the cash.

**Table 17** Circumstances of theft

	n	%
Theft, following unlawful entry	614	87
Theft, following robbery	18	3
Misplaced, presumed stolen	16	2
Presumed stolen in transit	13	2
Not returned to owner	6	1
Other <sup>a</sup>	31	4
Unknown	10	1
Total	708	100

a: Includes stealing (eg by relatives, owners, visitors to the house)

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]



## Location of firearm thefts

Around three-quarters of firearm thefts occurred at private residential premises, as has been the case in the previous three years (Table 18). A similar proportion of thefts targeted business premises (10%) and vehicles (9%). More detailed information regarding the precise location of the firearm at the time of theft is presented in Table 19. The majority of firearms were stolen from rooms in private dwellings (48%) or garages and sheds (25%). Theft from other locations each represented five percent or less of all firearm theft incidents.

Firearms stolen from business premises were mostly stored in garages or sheds (15 of 70 thefts, or 21%), warehouses (17%) or administrative offices (13%). Vehicles from which firearms were stolen were parked in private driveways (20 of 66 thefts, or 30%) or on public roads (n=14, or 21%), and less so in garages or sheds (6%). Twelve percent of firearm thefts from vehicles followed the car being left unattended (and usually unlocked) in a bushland or rural setting.

**Table 18** Location of incidents of firearm theft

	n	%
Private residential premises	534	76
Business premises	70	10
Other accommodation	2	<1
Vehicle	66	9
In transit	13	2
Other	17	2
Unknown	4	1
Total	706	100

Note: Excludes two incidents where location was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

While rifles (85%), shotguns (85%) and air rifles (81%) were predominantly stolen from private residential premises, over half of all handguns stolen in 2007–08 were taken from business premises (52%; Table 20). In 2005–06 and 2006–07, just over one-fifth of handguns were stolen from business premises. This apparent substitution is probably artificial as the 2007–08 data includes the theft of 46 handguns from one dealership. If this incident is excluded from the 2007–08 analysis, 53 percent of handguns are found to have been stolen from

private residential premises and 31 percent from businesses. While reinstating private residences as the main repository for handgun theft, the percentage stolen from business premises can be seen as a genuine increase from previous years.

**Table 19** Specific location of incidents of firearm theft

	n	%
Room in dwelling	343	48
Caravan	6	1
Rural or bushland	16	2
Warehouse or factory	14	2
Carried on person	1	0
Government premises	3	0
Retail location <sup>a</sup>	8	1
Garage or shed	178	25
Private driveway	20	3
Public road or car park	17	2
Administrative office	10	1
Firearms range	6	1
Club <sup>b</sup>	6	1
Other <sup>c</sup>	22	3
Not applicable	7	1
Unknown	51	7
Total	708	100

a: Includes shopping malls, service stations and firearm dealerships

b: Includes RSL clubs, pistol and sporting shooters clubs and unspecified

c: Includes backyards of private residences, sleep-outs, converted barns, ceiling cavities, shipping containers, car yards, demolition yards, workrooms, loading docks, wheelhouses of boats, caravan parks, horse tracks, stables, animal shelter storage areas, museum showrooms, public gardens, airports and unspecified

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

The geographic distribution of firearm thefts can be described by remoteness; the *ABS Remoteness Index* (ABS 2006) classifies differing degrees of remoteness based on the minimum road distance from a specified population locality to five service centres of differing population size. The index defines five remoteness areas—major city, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. Only New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia will be considered here.

The distribution of thefts across different remoteness categories again varied between jurisdictions (Figure

**Table 20** Location of firearm thefts, by type of firearm stolen

	Rifle		Shotgun		Air rifle		Handgun	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Private residential premises	803	85	352	85	102	81	57	37
Business premises	58	6	39	9	13	10	80	52
Other accommodation	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Vehicle	62	7	10	2	5	4	11	7
In transit	9	1	5	1	2	2	1	1
Other	12	1	4	1	2	2	5	3
Unknown	3	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
Total	948	100	412	100	125	100	154	100

Note: Excludes two incidents where location was recorded as not application

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

5). Most thefts in New South Wales and Victoria were centred in major city and inner regional areas, as were those in South Australia, although there was a greater concentration of firearm thefts in their major city (Adelaide 49%) compared with inner regional areas (30%). In contrast, firearm thefts in Queensland predominated in outer regional areas (34%) and inner regional areas (31%), with one-fifth (22%) occurring in the major city area.

Firearm thefts from private residential premises tended to occur in inner regional areas, followed by major cities (Figure 6), whereas the majority targeting business premises took place in major cities (51%). As found in previous years, thefts from vehicles were relatively evenly spread between major cities and inner and outer regional areas. A higher proportion, compared with other theft locations, was reported as being stolen from remote (9% of all thefts from vehicles) and very remote locations (6%).

of business premises were broken into by the use of tools (26%), one-quarter by use of force (27%) and one-quarter because they were not locked at the time of the theft (27%). Vehicles from which firearms were stolen were either unlocked (27%) or broken into by use of force to the window, door or boot (24%).

Force was the most common method of gaining entry to premises or vehicles for incidents of general burglary (44%; Table 21), followed by the use of tools (20%). For firearm-only thefts, over one-quarter of thefts (27%) were characterised by the premises or vehicle being unsecured at the time of the theft and another one-quarter (26%) through the application of force. Once again, it was sheds or garages that tended to be left unsecured (51% of all incidents in which the premises was recorded as unsecured).

## How offenders gain access to premises and vehicles

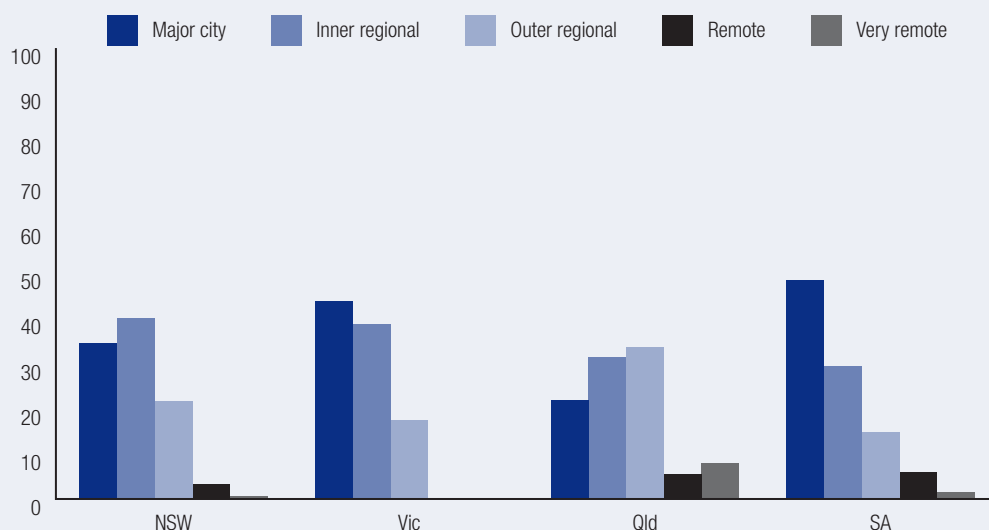
As found for previous years, private residential premises from which firearms were stolen were primarily entered following an application of force to windows or doors (39%). Access was gained in around one-fifth of thefts through the use of tools (20%) or because the house or shed was not properly secured (19%; Figure 7). One-quarter (26%)

## Items stolen

### *Firearms and ammunition*

Just under half (48%) of firearm-theft incidents resulted in the theft of a single firearm (Table 22). Twenty-three percent of incidents involved the theft of two firearms, 11 percent of three firearms and six percent of four firearms (Table 20). In Queensland, one incident netted 55 firearms in total. Firearm thefts from private residential premises generally resulted in the theft of more than one firearm (302)

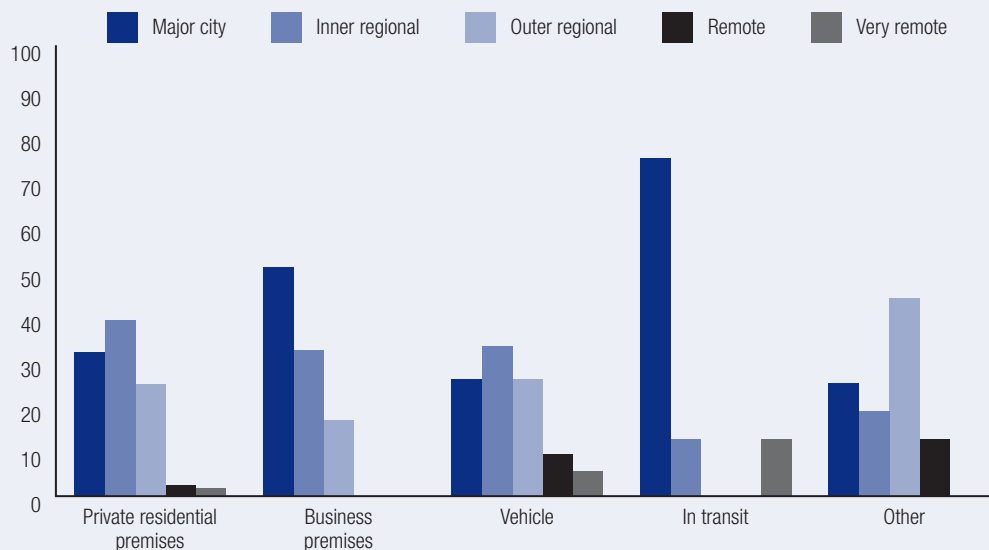
**Figure 5** Firearm thefts, by remoteness and jurisdiction (%)



Note: Excludes Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory due to small numbers

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

**Figure 6** Firearm thefts, by remoteness and location type (%)



Note: Excludes 16 incidents in which postcode or location type was recorded as unknown or not applicable

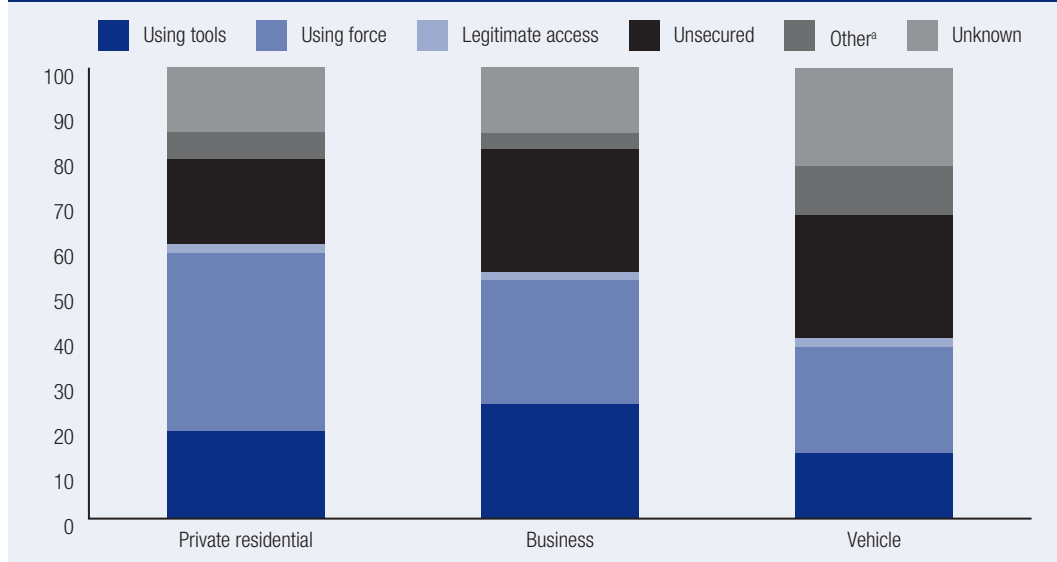
Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

or 57% of all thefts from this location; Figure 8) and thefts from vehicles of a single firearm (50 or 76%).

Ammunition was reported stolen in one-quarter of firearm thefts (Table 23). Data is requested on the

calibre and amount of ammunition stolen but data quality was too variable to accurately describe the type of ammunition stolen, or if the ammunition stolen matched the firearms reported stolen.

**Figure 7 Method of access to premises or vehicle (%)**

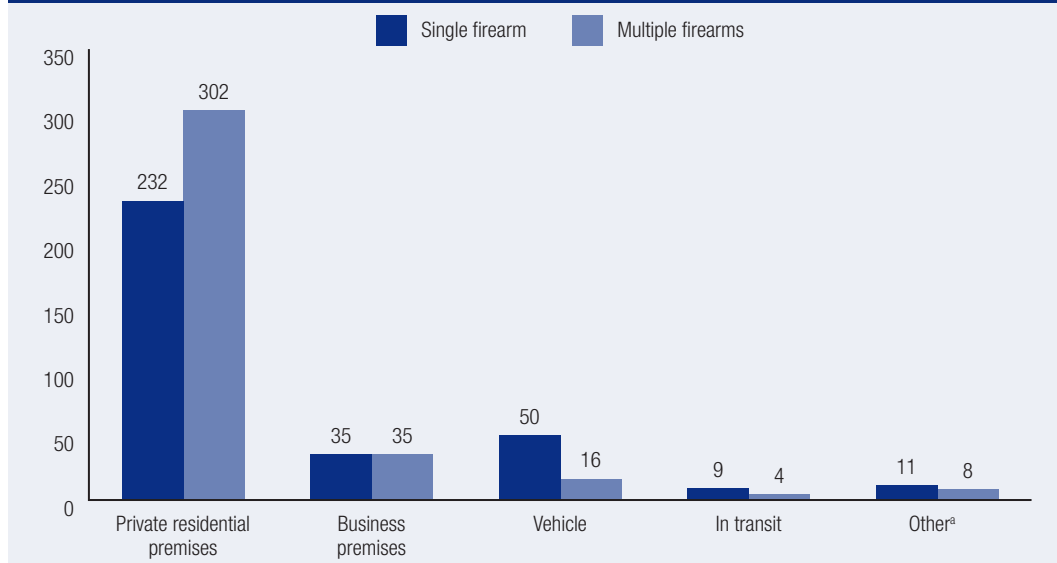


a: Includes using threat, using stolen key and for firearms stolen from vehicles, vehicle stolen

Note: Excludes 19 incidents in which method of entry was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia); Table 40

**Figure 8 Single versus multiple firearm theft, by location type (n)**

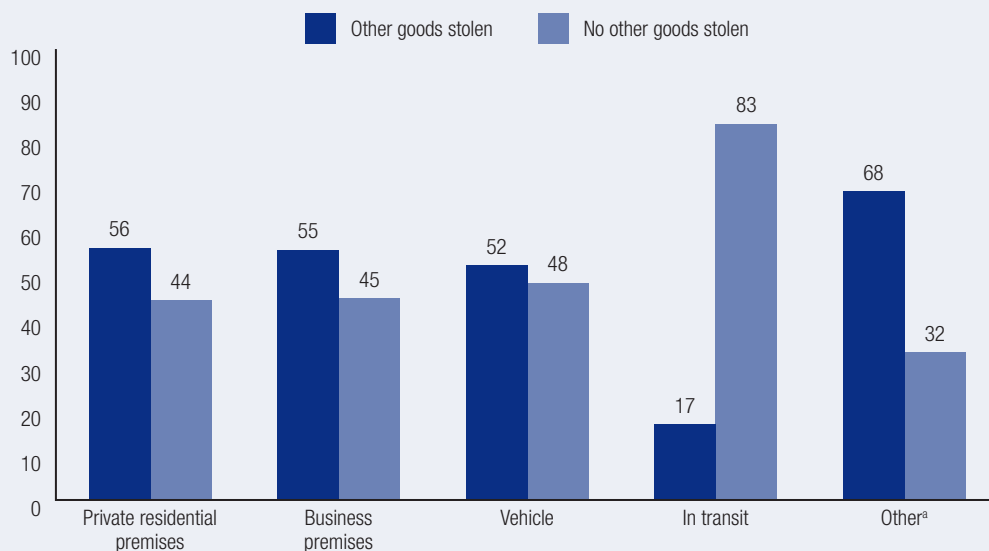


a: Includes other accommodation

Note: Excludes six incidents in which location was unknown

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Figure 9 Theft of other goods, by type of location (%)**

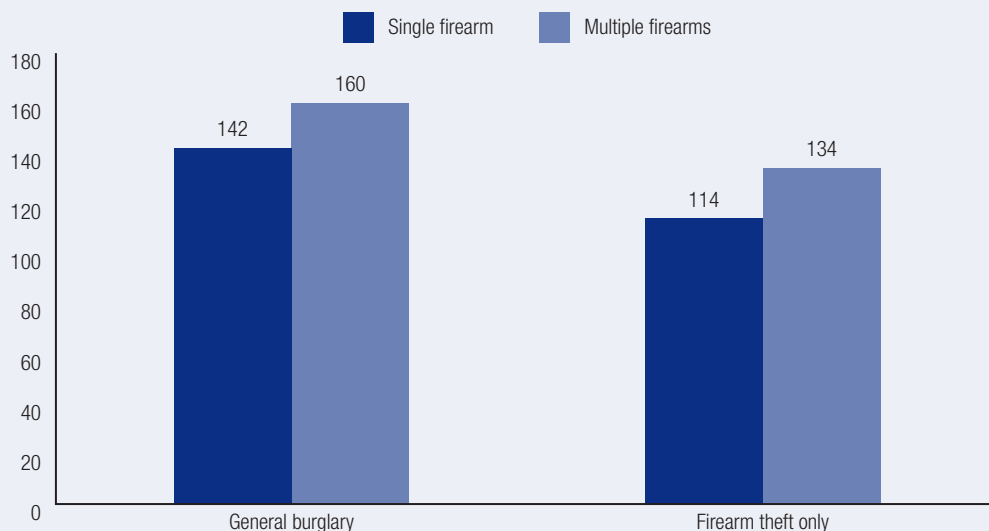


a: Includes other accommodation

Note: Excludes 18 incidents in which the theft of other goods was recorded as unknown or not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

**Figure 10 Type of theft, by single/multiple firearm theft (n)**



Note: Excludes 18 incidents in which the theft of other goods was recorded as unknown or not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

**Table 21** Method of gaining entry to premises or vehicle, by type of theft

	General burglary		Firearm-only theft	
	n	%	n	%
Using tools	58	20	40	17
Using force	126	44	63	26
Using threat	3	1	1	<1
Using stolen key	7	2	8	3
Legitimate access	2	1	9	4
Stole vehicle	5	2	0	0
Premises or vehicle unsecured	50	17	64	27
Other	7	2	1	<1
Unknown	31	11	55	23
Total	289	100	241	100

Note: Excludes 20 incidents in which method of entry was recorded as not applicable and 18 incidents in which the theft of other goods was unknown or was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

**Table 22** Firearms stolen per theft

Firearms (n)	Incidents (n)	% of incidents
One	343	48
Two	162	23
Three	79	11
Four	42	6
Five	30	4
Six	21	3
Seven or more	31	4
Total	708	100

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 23** Theft of ammunition

	n	%
Ammunition stolen	140	25
Not stolen	395	70
Unknown	27	5
Total	562	100

Note: Excludes six incidents in which the theft of ammunition was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

**Table 24** Theft of other goods

	n	%
Other goods stolen	302	54
Other goods not stolen	248	44
Unknown	11	2
Total	561	100

Note: Excludes seven incidents in which the theft of other goods was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

**Table 25** Types of other goods stolen

	General burglaries (n)	General burglaries (%)
Cash	71	24
Tools	65	22
Home entertainment	64	21
Jewellery/watches	58	19
Personal electronic items	57	19
PCs and accessories	38	13
Firearm accessories	36	12
Storage items	33	11
Personal items	31	10
Alcohol and other drugs	29	10
Other weapons	27	9
Recreational items	25	8
Vehicles	22	7
Other household items	20	7
Vehicle accessories	18	6
DVDs, CDs, video games etc	17	6
ID and negotiable documents	13	4
Collectible items	12	4
Agricultural items	9	3
Keys	9	3
Household electrical appliances	7	2
Other	30	10

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

### *Other, non-firearm goods*

Theft incidents in which goods other than firearms were stolen are classified here as general burglaries, while incidents characterised by the theft of only firearms and ammunition as possible incidents of targeted theft. Fifty-four percent of thefts in 2007–08 were general burglaries (as they were in 2006–07) and slightly below the 60 percent recorded in 2005–06 (Table 24). Thefts from private residential and business premises tended towards general burglaries (56% and 58%) while around one-half of thefts from vehicles involved the theft of goods other than firearms (Figure 9). There was no association, however, between the type of theft and whether a single firearm or multiple firearms were stolen

(Figure 10). Fifty-three percent of general burglaries were characterised by multiple firearms stolen, as were 54 percent of 'targeted' firearm thefts.

Table 25 lists other goods stolen in incidents of reported firearm theft. Because the amount of detail provided on the type and number of individual items stolen varies between incident and between jurisdiction, data presented here simply indicates the number of incidents in which a particular category of goods was stolen. Cash was stolen in one-quarter of all general burglaries and tools, jewellery and watches, and home entertainment items (eg TVs, DVD players, stereo systems) stolen in around one-fifth of general burglaries each.

# Compliance with the law

## Security and storage

There was no change from previous years in the way in which firearms and ammunition were stored at the time of theft. The stolen firearms and ammunition had been mainly stored in safes or secure receptacles (57% of reported thefts each), then in vehicles (9% each; Tables 26 and 27). Firearm regulations mandate ammunition be stored separately from firearms, but data from 2007–08 was not detailed enough to discern any propensity to observe this law.

In 10 percent of firearm thefts, owners made little or no attempt to properly secure an unattended firearm and in another 10 percent, there was no information regarding what the storage arrangements had been. Individual owners relied on a number of unique places to hide their firearms, including fridges, within ceiling cavities and inserted down steel pipes. In a quarter of ammunition thefts the storage location was unknown.

## Compliance status

Compliance with firearm storage laws (ie legal requirements regarding the safe storage of firearms when unattended) has remained consistent with just over one-half of all firearm owners reporting a theft deemed to have complied. In 2007–08, 56 percent

of owners were found by police to have complied and 30 percent not to have complied (Table 28). An unknown compliance status was returned for 14 percent of thefts, largely because information on storage arrangements was not adequate enough or known in order to discern whether the firearm owner was compliant or not.

Most jurisdictions recorded an improvement or no change in firearm owner storage compliance from the previous year (Table 29). South Australia's compliance rate dropped to 59 percent from 85 percent in 2006–07 and Tasmania's to 50 percent from 77 percent, although the latter is based on small numbers and hence this finding should be treated with caution. The finding for South Australia for 2007–08 is at odds with a generally high compliance rate observed in the previous three years (Figure 11).

Figure 12 compares the compliance status recorded for different storage arrangements. Results generally follow what is to be expected, that is, owners who stored firearms in locked receptacles were deemed as compliant and those who had not locked the receptacle or left the firearm otherwise unsecured were deemed non-compliant (although there were a few anomalies that cannot be explained with the available data). The compliance status of firearms owners who reported the theft of firearms from locked vehicles continues to vary. The general trend



**Table 26** Firearm storage

	n	%
Safe or other secure receptacle	397	57
Strong room/vault	5	1
On display	6	1
In vehicle	66	9
Carried on person	15	2
Unsecured/in the open	71	10
Unknown	72	10
Other	69	10
Cupboard/wardrobe	37	5
Locker	12	2
Box	4	<1
Shipping container	2	<1
Fridge/freezer	2	<1
Parcel/postbag <sup>a</sup>	2	<1
Firearms case	2	<1
Clothes drawer	1	<1
Ceiling cavity	1	<1
Steel pipes	1	<1
Not stated	2	<1
Total	701	100

a: Firearms stolen while in the postal system

Note: Excludes seven incidents in which method of firearm storage was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 27** Ammunition storage

	n	%
Safe or secure receptacle	78	57
Locked	69	50
Unlocked	9	7
Unsecured/in the open	4	3
Vehicle	12	9
Other	8	6
Unknown	35	26
Total	137	100

Note: Excludes three incidents in which method of ammunition storage was recorded as not applicable

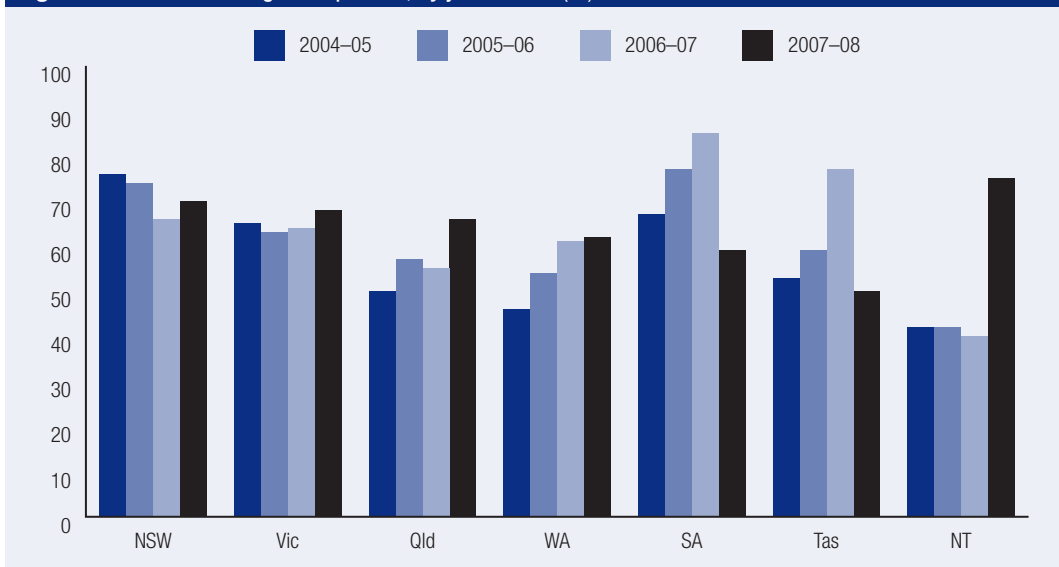
Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

**Table 28** Status of compliance with firearm storage laws

	n	%
Complied	392	56
Not complied	208	30
Unknown	101	14
Total	701	100

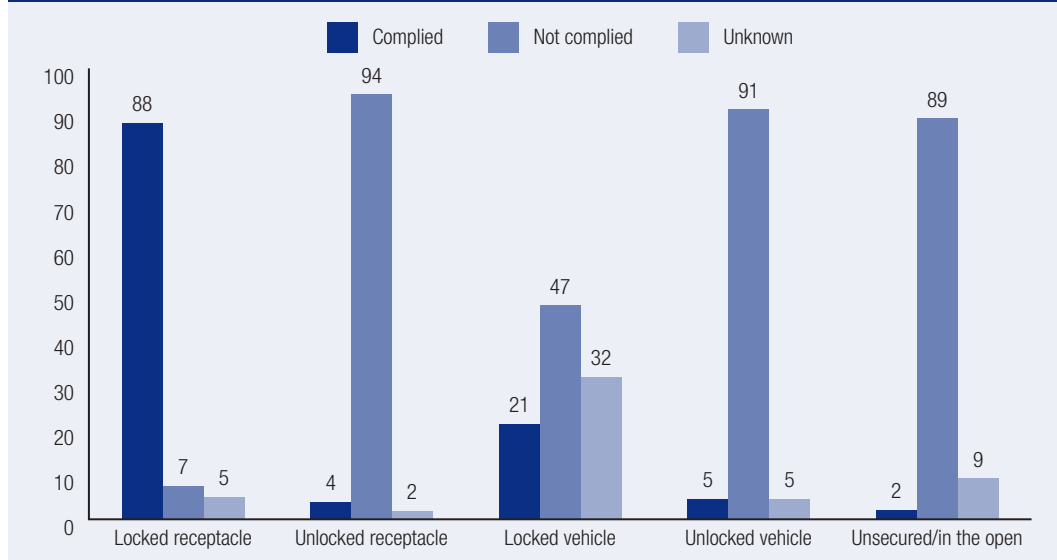
Note: Excludes seven incidents in which method of firearm storage was recorded as not applicable and hence not subject to compliance laws

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Figure 11** Trend in storage compliance, by jurisdiction (%)

Note: Excludes Australian Capital Territory due to absence of data from 2006–07. Total number of thefts recorded for Tasmania and NT are small compared to other jurisdictions and these data should hence be treated with caution

Source: AIC NFTMP 2004–08 [computer file]

**Figure 12** Type of firearm storage and status of compliance (%)

Note: Excludes three incidents where compliance status was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 29** Incidence of safe storage compliance, by jurisdiction

	Complied		Not complied	
	n	%	n	%
NSW	112	70	48	30
Vic	82	68	38	32
Qld	67	66	35	34
WA	74	62	45	38
SA	35	59	24	41
Tas	16	50	16	50
ACT	3	75	1	25
NT	3	75	1	25

Note: Excludes 108 incidents in which method of firearm storage was recorded as not applicable and hence not subject to compliance laws

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

is that the majority of owners are found to be non-compliant, irrespective of where the car was parked, but there is always a small, but not insubstantial, group who are deemed compliant or more commonly awarded an unknown compliance status. Previous analyses suggest that compliance is recorded if the owner made an attempt to secure the firearm within the locked vehicle and non-

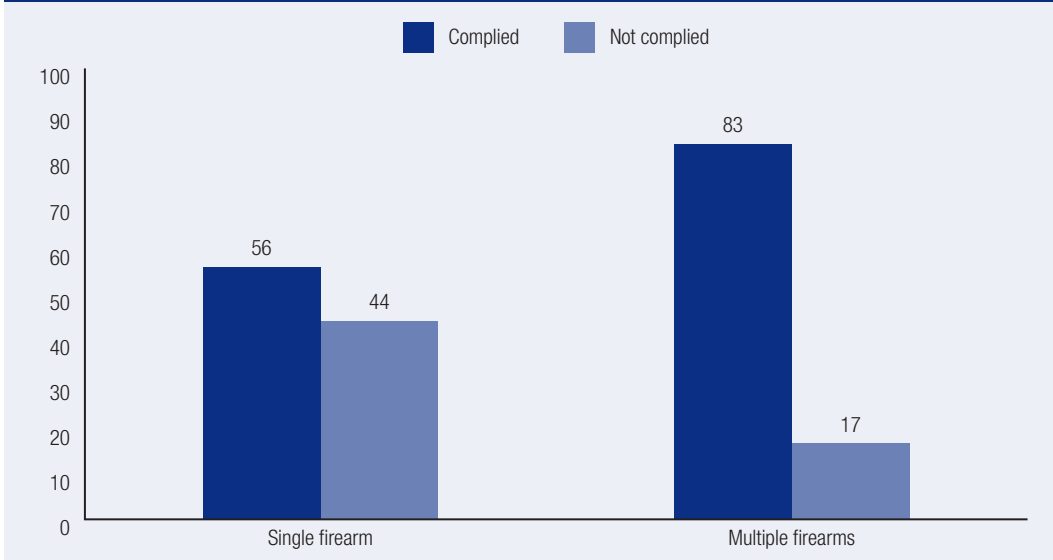
compliance recorded if the vehicle was parked in a more public location, other firearm-related items (eg ammunition) were also stolen and/or there was some ambiguity as to how a supposedly locked vehicle was penetrated. None of these factors seemed to influence the determination of compliance status in 2007–08, other than some evidence that owners who secured their weapons in the unattended vehicle were noted as storage compliant.

Compliance with firearm storage was much greater for owners who reported multiple firearm theft (83%) compared with those reporting the theft of a single firearm (56%; Figure 13). No difference was observed depending on type of theft—66 percent compliance for owners who reported a general burglary and 63 percent for owners who had only firearms stolen (Figure 14). This differs from previous years when compliance tended to be higher for owners who reported a general burglary.

### *Method of accessing firearms*

Firearm laws in each state and territory stipulate approved storage and safekeeping requirements for different categories of firearm and in 2007–08, 56 percent of owners were deemed to have followed

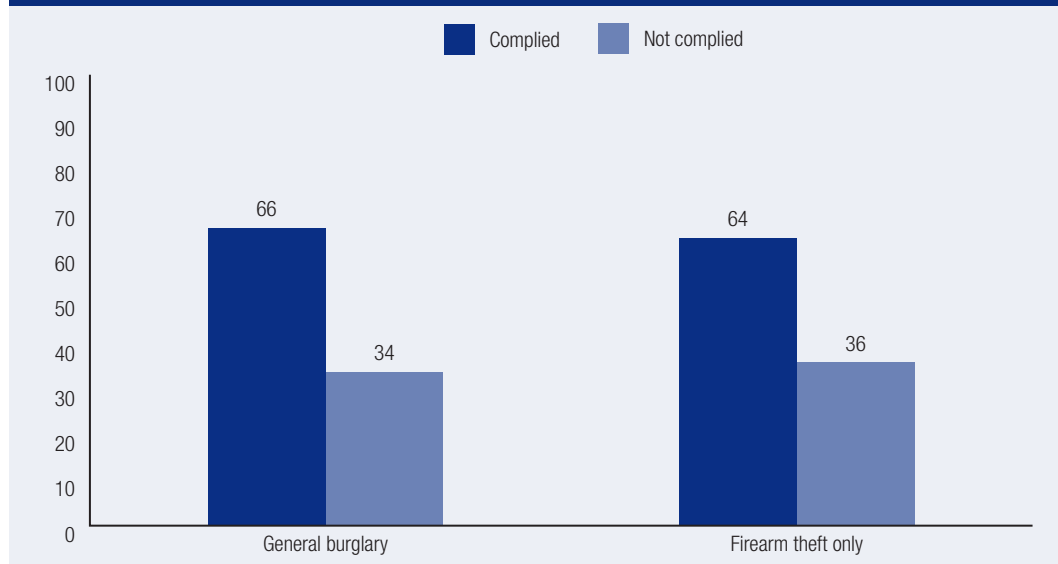
**Figure 13** Storage compliance, by number of firearms stolen (%)



Note: Excludes 108 incidents where compliance status was recorded as unknown or not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Figure 14** Storage compliance, by type of theft (%)



Note: Excludes 117 incidents where compliance status or type of theft was recorded as unknown or not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

these requirements. Where firearms had been stored in firearm safes or otherwise secure receptacles, the majority had to be breached either by the use of tools (32%) or the application of force (30%; Table 30). One-fifth, however, were opened because a key

to the safe was located or the offender was able to break the combination lock. In each of the years since 2004–05, this method of access has accounted for at least 20 percent of all firearms theft, suggesting that some firearm owners are still being

somewhat lax with hiding keys and/or safe combinations are particularly vulnerable to tampering.

Firearms are not as easily secured in vehicles, but in a small proportion of incidents, offenders needed to rely on strength or had employed tools to remove firearms from in-vehicle storage arrangements. The majority of thefts (86%) were facilitated by the firearm not being secured and hence could be removed easily once the vehicle had been broken into.

**Table 30** Method used to access firearm storage repository

	Safe/other secure receptacle		Vehicle		Other	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Using tools	113	32	2	4	14	22
Using force	108	30	1	2	10	16
Using threat	2	1	0	0	0	0
Key located/broke combination	76	21	1	2	2	3
Legitimate access	0	0	0	0	1	2
Stole vehicle	0	0	1	2	0	0
Entire receptacle stolen	39	11	2	4	2	3
Other	2	1	0	0	0	0
Unsecured	17	5	44	86	35	55
Total	357	100	51	100	64	100

Note: Excludes 165 incidents in which firearms were carried on the person or described as unsecured at their time of theft or in which the method of storage was recorded as unknown or not applicable and 71 incidents in which the method by which the firearm was accessed was recorded as unknown or not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

# Prosecution of non-compliance

In any given year since 2004, around one-quarter of firearm owners who reported the theft of a firearm were subsequently found to be in breach of firearms laws. In 2007–08, 168 firearms owners (24%) were known to have breached at least one law or regulatory requirement regarding firearm ownership, use, or storage (Table 31). Breaching was greatest in South Australia (34% in contrast with 2006–07 where this state recorded the lowest level of breaching) and Western Australia (31%; Figure 15).

**Table 31** Firearm owners found in breach of firearm laws

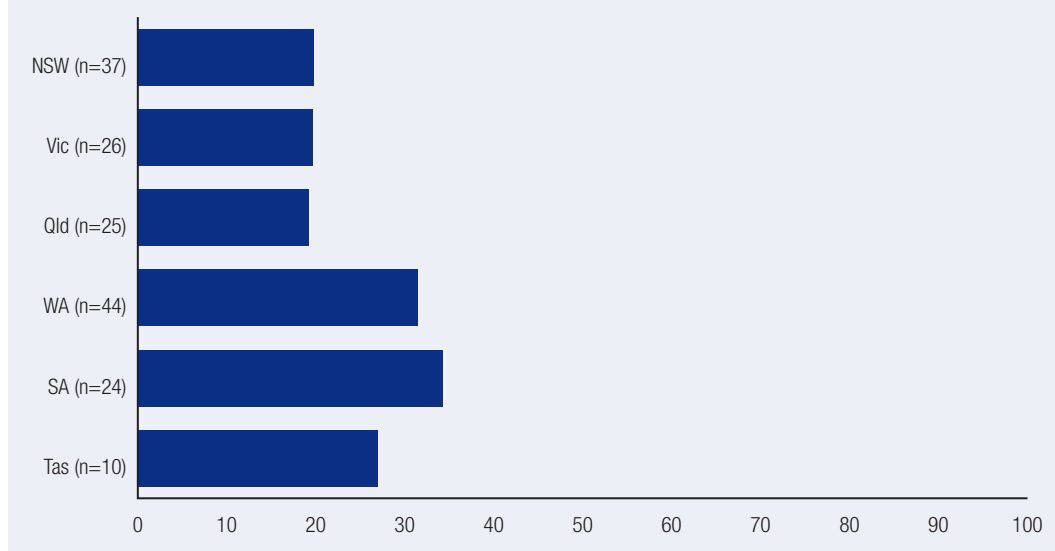
	n	%
In breach	168	24
Not in breach	488	69
Unknown	50	7
Not applicable	2	<1
Total	708	100

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

One-third of firearm owners (in all jurisdictions except Western Australia) who were found to be in breach of firearm laws were not proceeded against (Table 32) but unlike previous years, little information was provided as to why charges were not laid. Of those who were proceeded against, the majority had been charged (46%) or had charges pending (11%).

Prosecution rates in 2007–08 were slightly higher than in 2006–07 (40%) but well below that recorded for 2005–06 (75%). In the five largest states, there was quite considerable variation as to whether formal action was taken or not. For example, in New South Wales and South Australia, 78 and 88 percent respectively of firearm owners who were found in breach were eventually charged or disciplined for a firearm-related offence; while only 23 percent in Victoria were similarly dealt with (Figure 16). Without additional narrative on the laws firearms owners were found in breach of, or why police chose not to lay charges in individual cases, it is difficult to interpret why these differences in prosecution rates exist. However, if prosecution rates are compared for the last four years, those in New South Wales and South Australia (leaving 2004–05 aside) have been more or less stable, whereas in other jurisdictions, they have fluctuated quite considerably and especially so in Victoria and Western Australia (Figure 17).

A total of 94 charges were laid (or pending) against owners of stolen firearms (in all jurisdictions except Western Australia; Table 33). Twenty-one firearm owners (25%) had multiple charges against them. Failing to secure firearms represented by far the most common charge (62% of all charges), followed by unlawful or unlicensed possession of a firearm (13%) and failure to correctly store ammunition (11%).

**Figure 15** Firearm owners found in breach of firearm laws, by jurisdiction (%)

Note: Excludes the Australian Capital Territory (n=1) and Northern Territory (n=1) due to small numbers

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 32** Prosecution of firearm owners found in breach of firearm laws

	n	%
Charged	78	46
Charges pending	19	11
Disciplinary action	7	4
Disciplinary action pending	3	2
No formal action	56	33
Unknown	5	3
Total	168	100

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

Forty-four firearms owners who had reported a firearm theft in 2007–08 (6%) either did not have a firearms licence of any sort, or one that was invalid for the firearms they reported stolen. Forty-two (6%) reported the theft of at least one unregistered firearm. Fourteen owners (2%) held neither a valid licence nor had registered their firearms. Twenty-seven of the 44 unlicensed firearm owners (61%) were subsequently found to be in breach of firearms laws, just over half of whom (n=16) were charged with a total of 24 charges that were either laid or pending against them. One-third of these charges related to the unlicensed possession of a firearm and 30 percent to a failure to secure said firearm.

**Table 33** Type of offences firearm owners charged with<sup>a</sup>

	n	%
Unlawful or unlicensed possession of a firearm	12	13
Possession of an unregistered firearm	5	5
Failure to secure or correctly store firearms	58	62
Failure to secure or correctly store ammunition	10	11
Breach of licence conditions	7	7
Other <sup>b</sup>	2	2
Total charges	94	100

a: Excludes 40 incidents in which, though the firearm owner was prosecuted, the nature of the offence was recorded as unknown

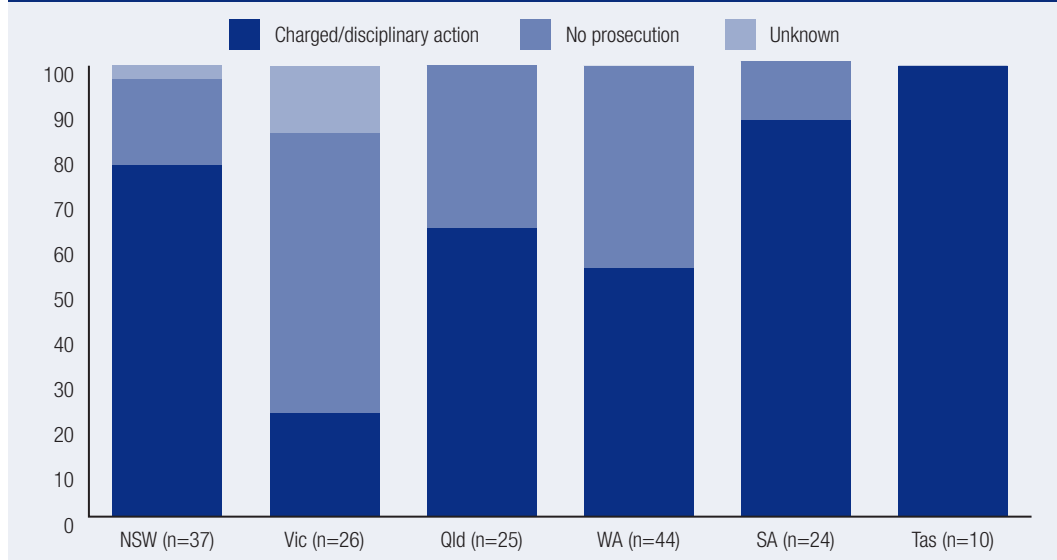
b: Includes failure to register and apply for licence in resident state (1) and allow unauthorised person to possess firearm (1). One firearm owner was also charged with drug offences but that charge is not included here

Note: Multiple charges were laid against owners in 21 incidents. The total number of charges therefore exceeds the total number of firearm owners prosecuted (ie 83)

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

A slightly smaller proportion (50%, n=21) of owners of stolen, unregistered firearms were recorded as being in breach of firearms laws and 12 of these (57%) were charged. Of the 19 charges laid, one-quarter were for unlawful or unlicensed possession of a firearm and one-fifth for possession of an unregistered firearm or failure to secure.

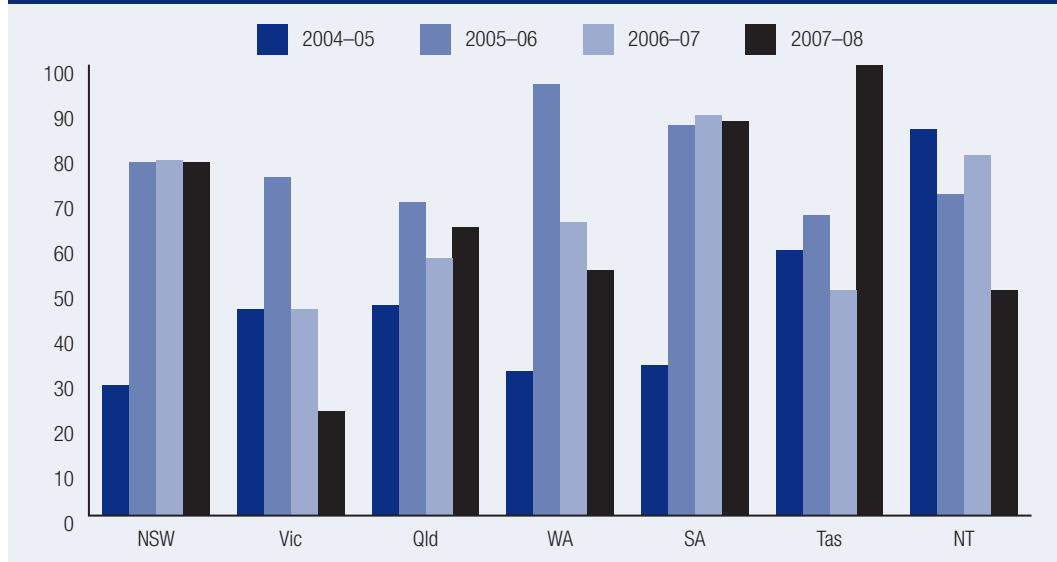
**Figure 16** Prosecution of firearm owners found in breach of firearm laws, by jurisdiction (%)



Note: Excludes the Australian Capital Territory (n=1) and Northern Territory (n=2) due to small numbers

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Figure 17** Prosecution rates, by jurisdiction, 2004–05 to 2007–08 (%)



Note: Excludes Australian Capital Territory due to absence of data from 2006–07. Total number of thefts recorded for Tasmania and Northern Territory are small compared to other jurisdictions and these data should hence be treated with caution

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

Of the 208 firearms owners described in the previous chapter as being in breach of firearm storage requirements, 149 (71%) were also recorded as being in breach of firearms laws in general.

Charges were eventually laid or disciplinary action pursued for 64 percent (n=95) of these 149 owners, up from the 48 percent (n=84) recorded in 2006–07.

# Other findings

## Repeat victimisation

Thirty-one incidents of firearms theft in 2007–08 (excluding Western Australia) were denoted as repeat victimisations, in that the location of the current theft or the company from which firearms were stolen (eg dealerships, security firm) had been the site or target of a previous burglary or robbery. Nineteen of these repeat victimisations targeted private residences and eight were businesses. The majority (74%, n=23) of previous thefts took place no more than 12 months before the current theft. No location was recorded as having been burgled more than twice.

Firearms were stolen from 20 of these 31 locations. For the 15 incidents in which information on the type of firearms stolen was provided, a total of 13 rifles, seven shotguns, five handguns and 12 other firearms (not further defined) were stolen. Most were stolen following a break and enter but all handguns were taken during armed robberies. Eighty percent of owners who reported multiple incidents of firearm theft were found to be storage compliant at the time of the most recent theft incident.

## Recovery of stolen firearms

Recovery rates for stolen firearms have averaged 12 to 13 percent of firearm theft incidents since

2004–05 and in 2007–08, the same rate was recorded (13%). Firearms were not recovered from 72 percent of incidents and recovery status was not known in 14 percent of cases. Excluding the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory, where small numbers preclude comment, the highest recovery rate was reported by Queensland, with firearms retrieved from over one-quarter (27%) of all thefts reported (Table 34). Firearms were known to have been returned to owners in 41 percent of cases (n=31), as they were in 2005–06 and 2006–07, and not returned in 37 percent of cases (n=28). No reasons were provided as to why firearms were not returned.

**Table 34** Recovery rates of firearms, by jurisdiction

	n	%
NSW	17	9
Vic	11	8
Qld	35	27
SA	5	7
Tas	4	11
ACT	2	33
NT	2	50
Total	76	13

Note: Data on recovery rates refer only to those in which the firearm was reclaimed in the jurisdiction in which the theft occurred

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)



# Prosecution of offenders

A total of 79 offenders were apprehended and subsequently dealt with in six of the eight Australian states and territories, giving a prosecution rate of 14 percent (Table 35). No proceedings were commenced in 71 percent of cases (n=405). Tasmania is not included here as their data returned a 100 percent unknown rate; Western Australia did not provide data for this variable.

Of the larger jurisdictions, around one-fifth of cases in Victoria and Queensland saw the eventual prosecution of an offender, whereas in New South Wales and South Australia, prosecutions accounted for 10 percent or less of cases. Note, however, that unknown returns in New South Wales were quite high compared to other jurisdictions (23%). Once again, the majority of offenders prosecuted had committed a general burglary (73% compared with 25% for firearm theft only).

Table 35 Offenders proceeded against, by jurisdiction		
	n	%
NSW	19	10
Vic	28	21
Qld	25	19
SA	4	6
ACT	2	33
NT	1	25
Total	79	14

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Tasmania and Western Australia)

The broader offence categories that offenders were charged with were available for 56 of the 79 cases in which an offender was proceeded against. Table 36 tabulates the number of cases in which a charge for a specific offence category was laid, regardless of whether one or multiple charges were made, or one or multiple offenders were being dealt with. Approximately half of the incidents in which an offender was prosecuted (52%) related to offences of burglary or unlawful entry with intent and just under half (46%) with actual theft or stealing. One-third could be characterised as prosecution for firearm offences, which included unlawful possession

or use of a firearm, possession of a prohibited firearm, unlawful supply and failure to secure.

Table 36 Offence type		
	n	%
Unlawful entry with intent/burglary	29	52
Theft/stealing	26	46
Firearm offences	18	32
Handling/receiving/dealing in stolen property	7	13
Robbery	3	5
Damage property	1	2
Other	13	23
Total incidents	97	–

Note: Percentage is of incidents in which an offender was proceeded against for a specific charge (56), excluding incidents in which no further information was provided. As multiple charges were prosecuted for some incidents, total column percentage will exceed 100

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

## Linking stolen firearms to crime

Information regarding the use of stolen firearms in subsequent criminal activity was available for 379 incidents of theft, or 67 percent of the 568 incidents that occurred in Australia (excluding Western Australia). Firearms stolen from just seven of these 379 incidents (or 2%) were recorded as having being used to commit a crime, or were associated with a prescribed firearm offence. Three handguns stolen from a Queensland dealership (where a total of 55 firearms were taken) were connected with three separate incidents: an attempted murder, a sudden death (suicide) and a charge of unlawful possession. Of the other six incidents, two were associated with the commission of violent offences (a rifle with ‘multiple’ armed robberies and a shotgun with a home invasion) and three with firearm offences. These latter offences consisted of possession of an altered firearm (in this case, a sawn-off shotgun), attempt to carry a weapon (shotgun) onto a plane and discharge in a public place. A seventh incident did not include a description of what the stolen handgun was used for.



# Conclusion

The compilation and analysis of four years of firearm theft data has revealed that patterns in firearm theft reported between 1 July 2004 and 30 June 2008 have remained generally consistent. Where variation is likely to occur is in the number of firearms reported stolen in each year, with an increase occurring in 2007–08 after a relatively stable period in the preceding years. The sharp increase in total firearms reported stolen in 2007–08, however, is related to the inclusion of a theft that netted 55 firearms and hence may reflect an anomalous year rather than an indication of an upward trend. Certainly, the method by which firearm thefts were committed in 2007–08, and the kinds of precautions owners used (or did not use) to secure their firearms, did not differ in any noticeable way to suggest offenders were getting better at stealing firearms, or owners were becoming more complacent about firearm storage. However, this and earlier analyses, particularly when describing state and territory differences, are based on small numbers (particularly for jurisdictions such as Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory) and any interpretation of results must consider issues inherent with small number analyses.

The majority of firearm thefts reported in Australia occur at private residential premises, from which less restricted firearms, predominantly category A rifles, are stolen. The predominance of these firearms is

most likely to reflect their greater ownership among the Australian firearm-owning community, rather than any deliberate targeting of such weapons. Furthermore, many firearms are stolen as part of a general burglary, further suggesting that some of these firearms are happened upon by chance rather than the offender having prior knowledge of their existence at the theft location.

Controlled firearms (or those with greater restrictions on ownership and use such as category C, D and H) feature less commonly in theft statistics. This is almost certainly related to their relative rarity compared with category A and B firearms but it may also be that owners, because of the nature of these weapons, are more likely to follow legislative provisions about their safeguarding. The illegal procurement of category C, D and H weapons is more likely to yield greater financial benefit, however, one of the unknowns in firearms research in Australia is where in the illegal firearms market these, and less restricted firearms, are ending up. Up to 70 percent of firearms reported stolen in a 12 month period are not recovered. A few have been later identified as having being used to commit violent offences, primarily armed robberies (but also two murders and one attempted murder, and three to commit or attempt suicide). The fate of the others is unclear; whether they are rotated through the criminal community and to what extent they may end up

outside this community with persons who do not wish to go through formal, legal proceedings to acquire a firearm and are ready to accept a second-hand weapon of unknown province.

The introduction in all states and territories of mandatory firearm storage arrangements is thought to have contributed to the considerable decline in stolen firearms from the last decade, where an estimated 4,195 firearms on average were stolen each year between 1994 and 2000, to the present decade. In the last few years, police and various firearms associations have run education campaigns to encourage compliance with storage requirements and police have undertaken to increase auditing and random spot-checks on firearm owners—not just to confirm records but inspect storage arrangements. Nonetheless, while there has been no decline in storage compliance among firearm owners, there has been no discernible improvement either, with an average of three in 10 owners still being described

as storage non-compliant. In many cases it is because the firearm has been left ‘out in the open’, ‘hidden’ in unapproved receptacles (such as wardrobes) or stowed in unattended vehicles. In a number of other cases, it is because the key to the safe was not sufficiently concealed, the safe was unlocked or the whole receptacle could be carried away. This general laxness is qualified by the fact that in the majority of cases, offenders have been confronted with safes and similar storage arrangements that require considerable work to open but it also raises the question whether certain approved models are as secure as they need to be. The determined offender will often find a method by which to penetrate objects concealing items they wish to steal, but since storage arrangements ultimately impact on the ease (or difficulty) of firearm theft, research suggests that some assessment of current storage models is required to assess their utility.

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# Appendix A: Additional tables

**Table 37** Types of firearms stolen from jurisdictions

	Rifle		Shotgun		Air rifle		Handgun		Other		Unknown	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
NSW	252	61	85	21	28	7	33	8	10	2	2	<1
Vic	153	46	111	33	28	8	9	3	27	8	4	1
Qld	172	49	73	21	25	7	78	22	4	1	0	0
WA	179	60	64	22	18	6	15	5	21	7	0	0
SA	121	63	47	24	15	8	10	5	0	0	0	0
Tas	57	53	30	28	11	10	8	7	0	0	1	1
ACT	7	78	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	22	0	0
NT	7	58	3	25	1	8	1	8	0	0	0	0
Australia	948	55	413	24	126	7	154	9	64	4	7	1

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 38** Category of firearm stolen, by jurisdiction

	A		B		C		D		H		Other	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
NSW	233	59	118	30	4	1	6	2	33	8	3	1
Vic	253	79	60	19	0	0	0	0	9	3	0	0
Qld	170	48	98	28	6	2	0	0	78	22	0	0
WA	195	67	55	19	10	3	0	0	15	5	17	6
SA	125	65	53	28	5	3	0	0	10	5	0	0
Tas	70	82	7	8	0	0	0	0	8	9	0	0
ACT	0	0	7	78	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	22
NT	5	42	6	50	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0
Australia	1,051	63	404	24	25	2	6	<1	154	9	22	1

Note: Excludes 50 firearms in which insufficient information was available to ascertain category of firearm

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file]

**Table 39** Period between incident date and reporting date by jurisdiction

	Day of incident		1 day		2–7 days		8–14 days		More than 2 weeks	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
NSW	76	41	44	24	37	20	10	5	20	11
Vic	38	29	35	26	27	20	5	4	28	21
Qld	63	48	17	13	14	11	8	6	29	22
SA	28	40	18	26	8	11	5	7	11	16
Tas	16	43	6	16	5	14	2	5	8	22
ACT	3	50	1	17	1	17	0	0	1	17
NT	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0	0	0
Australia	227	40	122	22	92	16	30	5	97	17

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

**Table 40** Method of access to premises or vehicle

	Private residential premises		Business premises		Vehicle	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Using tools	78	20	14	26	8	15
Using force	158	39	15	27	13	24
Legitimate access	8	2	1	2	1	2
Premises unsecured	75	19	15	27	15	27
Other	24	6	2	4	6	11
Unknown	58	15	8	15	12	22
Total	401	100	55	100	55	100

Note: Excludes 19 incidents in which method of access was recorded as not applicable

Source: AIC NFTMP 2007–08 [computer file] (excludes Western Australia)

# Appendix B:

## Firearms classifications

**Table 41** Firearm classifications according to the National Firearms Agreement 1996

Category A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• air rifles;</li><li>• rimfire rifles (excluding self-loading); and</li><li>• single and double barrelled shotguns.</li></ul>
Category B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• muzzle-loading firearms;</li><li>• single shot, double-barrelled and repeating action centre-fire rifles; and</li><li>• break-action shotguns/rifle combinations.</li></ul>
Category C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prohibited except for occupational purposes;</li><li>• self-loading rimfire rifles with a magazine capacity no greater than 10 rounds;</li><li>• self-loading shotguns with a magazine capacity no greater than five rounds; and</li><li>• pump-action shotguns with a magazine capacity no greater than five rounds.</li></ul>
Category D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prohibited except for official purposes;</li><li>• self-loading centre-fire rifles;</li><li>• self-loading shotguns and pump-action shotguns with a capacity of more than five rounds; and</li><li>• self-loading rimfire rifles with a magazine capacity greater than 10 rounds.</li></ul>
Category H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• all handguns, including air pistols.</li></ul>

Note: Firearm categories vary slightly between jurisdictions

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