
Legislative statement

Arms Bill

First Reading

December 2025

Presented to the House of Representatives
under Standing Orders 272

Hon Nicole McKee
Associate Minister of Justice
Minister in charge of the bill

Overview of the Bill

What does the Bill do?

- The Arms Bill (the Bill) repeals and replaces the Arms Act 1983 (the Act) to:
 - a. provide for greater protection of public safety;
 - b. simplify regulatory requirements; and
 - c. improve compliance.

Why is the Bill needed?

- The Arms Act 1983 has been in place for more than 40 years and has undergone multiple amendments in that time. These were often done quickly and without a comprehensive review of the overall framework. This piecemeal approach has resulted in a complex and overly burdensome regulatory regime.
- The New Zealand firearms regulatory system allows individuals considered “fit and proper” to possess arms items, subject to safeguards. A strong culture of community safety, supported by clear regulations, helps to maintain public safety.
- The Bill simplifies the law relating to firearms, it rewrites the current Act in plain English, simplifies regulatory requirements to improve compliance and strengthens New Zealand’s firearms laws to provide for greater protection of public safety.

Main policy proposals

- The Bill is structured so that it is easy to navigate and uses plain language, helping the firearms community better understand their obligations.

Encouraging a culture of community safety and support

- The Bill strengthens this culture by broadening the principles of the Act to ensure any person or organisation undertaking activities covered by the new legislation must act in the interests of personal, community and public safety.
- It introduces additional safeguards to ensure only responsible users can access arms items. This includes preventing gang members from holding firearms licences, and increased regulation of items, such as blank-firing guns, which could be misused or converted into firearms.
- To support compliance and ensure firearms users stay within the system, the Bill reduces regulatory burden on licence applicants, licence holders, and the Arms Regulator through enabling licence extensions, urgent renewals, and multi-entry visitor’s licences.

- It also establishes a Firearms Licensing Review Committee composed of independent members to review licensing decisions. This will increase transparency and improve the firearms community's trust and confidence in the system.

Enabling legitimate possession and use

- Licensing is the primary tool for controlling access to arms items, supported by endorsements and approvals. The current system can be burdensome on the regulator, licence applicants, and licence holders.
- The Bill simplifies regulatory settings while maintaining safety standards. Key changes include:
 - a. replacing dealer's licences with business licences that focus on commercial or specialist activities and have longer duration;
 - b. enabling the regulator to address long-standing demand and processing issues by granting licence extensions of up to three years for low-risk renewals;
 - c. improving importing processes;
 - d. no longer requiring employees of licensed businesses to have endorsements on their personal licences;
 - e. introducing specialist licence classes for museum curators and their employees;
 - f. establishing an approvals scheme for commercial/retail ammunition sellers;
 - g. updating endorsement settings for animal and biosecurity controllers; and
 - h. updating endorsement settings for firearm collectors.

Ensuring compliance through education and enforcement

- A modern, transparent regulatory system helps licence holders understand and meet their obligations, while providing tools to manage risk and non-compliance.
- The Bill improves understanding by clarifying regulatory requirements and introducing additional graduated, proportionate enforcement tools. This includes:
 - a. allowing the regulator to issue guidance on a broad range of topics, after consulting with the Minister's Arms Advisory Group and the firearms community;
 - b. introducing processes to bring unlawful firearms into lawful possession;
 - c. establishing an infringement offence regime and making adjustments to the suspension regime;

- d. updating offences and penalties to ensure they are modern, address legislative gaps, and respond to emerging technology such as 3D-printing.

Maintaining public interest and safety

- Improving the delivery and oversight of the firearms regulatory regime is key to building public trust and confidence in the system.
- The Bill establishes a new firearms regulatory agency. This agency will operate independently from New Zealand Police, to enhance transparency and improve trust and confidence in the system. The regulator prioritises education and support as the first step in compliance, before enforcement.
- Related changes include:
 - a. codifying the core regulatory functions of the new agency and the Police;
 - b. establishing a chief executive of the new agency who is appointed by the Governor-General and accountable to the responsible Minister for the agency's regulatory functions;
 - c. expressly providing for information sharing between the regulator and certain agencies; and
 - d. requiring fees to be reviewed every 5 years.

Development of bill

- Cabinet agreed to the policy proposals in the Arms Bill in a series of decisions on 16 May 2025, 23 June 2025, 8 September 2025 and 22 September 2025. Cabinet agreed to introduce the Arms Bill on 13 November 2025.
- The Ministry of Justice carried out public consultation on the rewrite of the Act between 13 January and 28 February 2025. A total of 8,448 submissions were received during consultation. In total, over 700,000 individual points were made by submitters.

Procedural matters

- The Associate Minister of Justice intends to nominate the Justice Committee to consider this Bill.

Further information

- Regulatory impact statements on the Bill: <https://www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector-policy/regulatory-stewardship/regulatory-impact-assessments/>
- Proactively released documents: [Firearms reform | New Zealand Ministry of Justice](#)

- The Ministry's discussion document: [Arms-Act-rewrite-discussion-document.pdf](#)