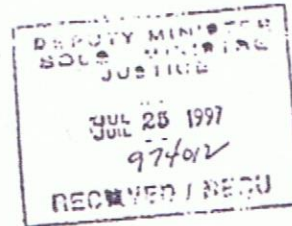


Royal Canadian Mounted Police



Gendarmerie royale du Canada

J.P.R. Murray
Commissioner Le Commissaire



July 21, 1997

Mr. George Thomson
Deputy Minister of Justice and
Deputy Attorney General of Canada
Department of Justice
Room 350, Justice Building
239 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0H8

Dear Mr. Thomson:

I am writing to request that the Department of Justice correct its representation of the 1993 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) statistics on firearms involved in crime.

Around June 1994, the Firearms Control Task Group requested information on all files investigated by the RCMP during 1993 where there was a firearm associated with it. Since the RCMP does not collect statistics on firearms in this format, a special software application was written to extract the data for the Department of Justice. The data was provided in electronic format with the coding information necessary to interpret this data. The Firearms Control Task Group tabulated the data and produced reports without consulting the RCMP staff on the accuracy of their interpretation of our data.

The RCMP became aware that there was a problem with the representation of the 1993 RCMP statistics on firearms involved in crimes in February 1997, as a result of correspondence from Ms. Wendy Cukier of the Coalition for Gun Control, in which she requested an affidavit as to the accuracy of the data in Appendix "A", titled "RCMP (PIRS) Table 2. Firearms Involved in Crime: Type of Firearm Recovered According to Offence." Ms. Cukier required the affidavit for use in the province of Alberta's

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Ottawa, Ontario
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1200 promenade Vanier
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constitutional challenge respecting the Firearms Act. The Firearms Control Task Group created Appendix "A" from the statistics obtained from the RCMP in 1994.

Since the RCMP had not created Appendix "A", we extracted the 1993 data again and tabulated the number of firearms involved in a crime under the category of violent offences. We believe that most people would interpret the Appendix "A" caption: "Firearms involved in Crime: Type of Firearm Recovered According to Offence" to mean a firearm used in the commission of an offence. In some cases, without completing a more detailed review of the file, it was impossible to make a definite determination; therefore, we resolved some of the questionable decisions in favor of the Department of Justice findings. We determined that our statistics showed that there were 73 firearms involved in a violent crime compared to the Department of Justice findings of 623 firearms involved in a violent crime. A further analysis of the Department of Justice statistics has not been done due to the volume of work involved. However, a cursory review of the remaining 909 firearm cases revealed that only a very small percentage of these would meet the definition of a firearm involved in a crime.

In order to mitigate damages, the Firearms Research Unit, the Department of Justice, and Ms. Cukier were notified that the RCMP could not provide an affidavit on the accuracy of the 1993 firearms statistics presented by the Department of Justice.

At a subsequent meeting with the Firearms Research Unit staff to discuss the release of similar 1995 RCMP statistics, they presented a report entitled, "The Illegal Movement of Firearms in Canada." This report contains the same statistics as those in Appendix "A", however, the RCMP statistics are combined with those of other major Canadian police forces. The Firearms Research Unit representatives believed that the firearms identified in Appendix "A" had actually been used in committing a crime.

It is of particular concern that the Minister of Justice and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police relied on these statistics while Bill C-68 was being processed in Parliament as evidenced by statements in the report, "Illegal Firearm Use in Canada."

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A quotation from page 2 of the report states that: "It can also be seen that rifles and shotguns were involved in 51% of violent firearm crimes, airguns were involved in 19%, and handguns were involved in 17% of violent crimes. The Firearms Smuggling Working Group was concerned with the significant number of long guns involved in crime." This statement is not significant when we consider that in 1993, the RCMP investigated 333 actual homicide offences, including attempts, but only 6 of these offences involved the use of firearms according to the statistics provided to the Firearms Control Task Group. Furthermore, the RCMP investigated 88,162 actual violent crimes during 1993, where only 73 of these offences, or 0.08%, involved the use of firearms. If we display the RCMP 73 offences in the same manner as the Firearms Control Task Group, we would say that rifles and shotguns were involved in 79.5% of violent firearm crimes investigated by the RCMP. This is not surprising when we recognize that rifles and shotguns represent 84.4% of all firearms in Canada. The difference between 623 violent firearm crimes credited to the RCMP, compared to the actual number of 73 is significant.

1 The Canadian Firearms Centre (CFC) staff were unwilling to meet to confirm where the problem occurred with the interpretation of the 1993 RCMP data. Their efforts were focused on producing a report on the 1995 firearms data. The CFC offered to make comparisons between the results of their current research project and other similar research conducted in the past. This proposal was not acceptable since there was no means to validate the 1993 data, only a possibility of some comments on differences between the findings of the two years. This would leave the 1993 data in circulation. The incorrect reporting of the RCMP statistics could cause the wrong public policy or laws to be developed and cause researchers to draw erroneous conclusions. Considering that the data is clearly marked as belonging to the RCMP, we must accept ownership and responsibility for the harm the data may cause. For these reasons, something must be done to correct the data or remove it from circulation.

Since the data in our Police Information Retrieval System (PIRS) and Operational Statistics Reporting (OSR) special reports is open to interpretation, it was necessary to

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suspend further release of similar firearms data pending an agreement on regulating this problem.

I am, therefore, requesting your assistance to resolve this issue. In addition, you may wish to inform the Minister of Justice about this issue to ensure that she does not refer to the RCMP statistics quoted in the Department of Justice report.

Sincerely,


S.P.R. Murray
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