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Regional Queensland voters' attitudes
towards current firearm laws
-Report of key survey findings-

Property of: **LAFO Inc.**

Prepared by: **The Sexton Marketing Group**

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1. **Introduction**

LAFO Inc. commissioned a public opinion survey among voters in regional Queensland (focusing on the Townsville region) on the topic of gun controls.

The primary objective of the survey was to measure public attitudes towards current gun licensing laws, and to gauge public opinion about the State Government's priorities in relation to the policing of guns.

The survey was conducted by independent market research firm The Sexton Marketing Group.

2. **Methodology**

2.1 **The sample**

A total of 450 Queensland voters (eligible to vote in Queensland State elections) were interviewed by telephone.

The sample was selected from the following State electorates:

Mundingburra	150
Thuringowa	150
Townsville	150
Total	450

The sample within each electorate (and across the three electorates) was matched to the age and gender profiles of the population in the Townsville region, as well as a geographic match in terms of the population distribution within each electorate.

2.2 **The statistical margin of error when generalising the results to the broader population in the Townsville region**

Given that the three State electorates included in the survey are all geographically adjacent to each other, the main results of interest are the results for the total sample of 450 voters, which has an associated error margin of $\pm 4.7\%$ at a 95% level of confidence. This means that any sample percentage reported in the results can be assumed with 95% confidence to be within $\pm 4.7\%$ of the broader population result.

The individual electorate results are also presented out of interest. With a sample of 150 in each electorate, the error margin is $\pm 8.2\%$ (with 95% confidence) within each electorate.

2.3 How the survey was conducted

A combination of landline calls, mobile phone calls and the use of online panels was used to obtain a representative sample.

A standard questionnaire was used to administer each interview.

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and based on random selection of households.

2.4 Timing

The survey was conducted in the week ending March 17, 2017.

2.5 Quality standards

The survey conformed to:

- ISO-20252 standards
- The code of ethics and professional conduct for market research in Australia
- The Australian Privacy Principles.

3. Executive summary

A random sample poll of 450 voters in the State electorates of Mundingburra, Thuringowa and Townsville (150 in each electorate) was conducted in the week ending March 17, 2017.

The poll gauged public attitudes towards various firearms-related issues, including attitudes towards the prospect of the Queensland State Government tightening laws for licensed gun owners.

The poll showed that, while there has been a swing away from both the LNP and the ALP in these three seats, with a large increase in the One Nation and KAP vote, the “net” outcome is a 2PP swing away from the ALP in all three seats, making all three seats highly marginal and therefore vulnerable for the Labor Party (which currently holds all three seats).

The poll also shows that voters in these three seats feel strongly enough about any further restrictions on gun owners' rights to register a protest vote in all three seats against the ALP, in sufficient numbers for the seats to all change hands.

With more than 50% of poll respondents either owning a firearm, or having a family member or friend who owns a firearm, the issue of gun controls is a broad-reaching issue in the Townsville region.

A total of 20% of Labor voters in the Townsville region who own a firearm (or have family or friends who own a firearm) indicated in this poll that they would shift their primary vote from Labor to another Party as a protest vote against harsher gun laws affecting licensed gun owners.

In addition, 51% of minor Party voters indicated that they would most likely direct their preferences away from the Labor Party if the State Labor Government pursued harsher gun laws, up from 46% who directed their preferences away from Labor over the past three State elections.

A combined loss of primary votes and preferences by the Labor Party is sufficient to cause Labor to lose all three Townsville seats, on this issue alone.

This poll also shows that Townsville region voters are ready to lodge a protest vote against the State Labor Government based on the Government “*not listening to the people in the Townsville region*” (across a range of topics affecting the local area).

A total of 64% of Townsville region voters believe that the State Government is not listening, out of touch and does not understand the local issues affecting the region. Only 15% believe that the State Government is listening and understands the needs of the Townsville region.

The poll also shows:

- Very strong support in the Townsville region for gun owners' rights, and the need to protect those rights, including farmers, recreational shooters and sporting shooters.
- A commonly held view that it is unfair to target licensed gun owners when the real priority should be to target unlicensed and illegal gun users (criminals, outlaw bikie gangs).
- A commonly held view that police and Customs resources should be stepped up, and re-focused on illegal gun imports and illegal gun possession by known suspects, rather than applying further blanket bans or restrictions on licensed gun owners.

The poll also shows that 74% of voters in the Townsville region, whether they have an affinity with firearms or not, believe that gun owners have the right to be listened to by the State Government when guns laws are reviewed.

Given that 67% of voters in the Townsville region believe that Queenslanders should have the right to own a gun (17% say no, 16% are neutral about this), but 74% believe gun owners have a right to be listened to, there is strong support in the local community for:

- (a) The right to own a gun, and
- (b) The right to be consulted about any review of gun laws.

Further results show:

- 59% of Townsville region voters oppose any bans on farmers' handguns (only 22% support).
- 47% oppose any further bans or restrictions on currently available firearms (29% support).
- 49% oppose higher costs and more red tape for gun licensing (36% support).
- 72% oppose targeting licensed gun owners instead of targeting bikies and criminals (17% support).
- 84% of Townsville region voters believe that the police's scarce resources should be used to target illegal gun possession among criminal elements, and not used to make it harder for licensed, law abiding gun owners.

The overall takeout from this poll is that there is a significant proportion of voters (at least 50%) in the Townsville region who have an affinity with guns, and who are prepared to vote with their feet to register a protest vote against any State Government proposal to make life harder for them.

With swings away from the Labor Party in all three Townsville region seats already evident in this latest poll, further swings on the issue of gun controls could easily see the loss of these seats for the Labor Party.

4. Key findings

4.1 Primary vote and 2PP

4.1.1 The State-wide context

The State-wide primary vote and 2PP results from the January 2015 State election and a recent Galaxy poll (8 – 9 February 2017) show the following State-wide swings:

<u>State-wide</u>	<u>State election (January 2015)</u>	<u>Galaxy poll * (Feb8/9, 2017)</u>	<u>Swing</u>
Primary vote			
LNP	41%	33%	-8%
ALP	38%	31%	-7%
Greens	8%	8%	0%
One-Nation	1%	23%	+22%
Katter's Australian Party [KAP]	2%	3%	+1%
Other	10%	2%	-8%
2PP			
LNP	49%	49%	0%
ALP	51%	51%	0%

[*Source: Galaxy website]

4.1.2 Three Townsville seats combined (Mundingburra, Thuringowa, Townsville)

<u>3 Townsville seats combined</u>	<u>State election (January 2015)</u>	<u>Sexton poll (March, 2017)</u>	<u>Swing</u>
Primary vote			
LNP	37%	26%	-11%
ALP	40%	26%	-14%
Greens	7%	7%	0%
One-Nation	4%	17%	+13%
PUP	11%	-	-11%
Katter's Australian Party [KAP]	-	12%	+12%
Other	1%	6%	+5%
Hard Undecided	-	6%	+6%
2PP			
LNP	45%	48%*	+3%
ALP	55%	52%	-3%

[*Based on the average preference flows from the last 3 Queensland State elections (2009, 2012, 2015)]

4.1.3 Individual State electorate results

Primary vote	Mundingburra			Thuringowa			Townsville		
	2015 election	March'17 Sexton Poll	Swing	2015 election	March'17 Sexton Poll	Swing	2015 election	March'17 Sexton Poll	Swing
LNP	41%	22%	-19%	34%	25%	-9%	36%	30%	-6%
ALP	40%	23%	-17%	39%	26%	-13%	40%	30%	-10%
Greens	8%	7%	-1%	4%	4%	0%	8%	8%	0%
One-Nation	-	16%	+16%	7%	23%	+16%	4%	13%	+9%
KAP	-	18%	+18%	-	10%	+10%	-	7%	+7%
Other	11%	7%	-4%	16%	5%	-11%	12%	6%	-6%
Hard Undecided	-	7%	+7%	-	7%	+7%	-	6%	+6%
2PP (based on how March 2017 Sexton poll voters directed their preferences)									
LNP	47%	49%	+2%	44%	50%	+6%	44%	48%	+4%
ALP	53%	51%	-2%	56%	50%	-6%	56%	52%	-4%

4.2 One of the reasons why there is a swing against the State Government in the Townsville region is that voters do not believe the State Government is listening to the local people.

The question asked was:

Do you feel that the State Government is listening to the people in the Townsville region and understands local issues, or do you feel that they are out of touch and not listening to the people in your area?	
Listening / in touch / understand local issues.....	1
Out of touch / not listening / ignoring local issues.....	2
Can't say / Undecided	3

The results for this question were:

- Only 15% of all voters polled believe that the State Government is listening to the people in the Townsville region.
- 64% think that the State Government is not listening to them.
- Even among ALP voters, only 43% believe that the State Government is listening.

This is an overall perception, relating to the general concerns that Townsville region voters have about a range of local issues going unaddressed.

4.3 Support for the State Labor Party is soft and could easily fall if the State Government is not across issues that matter to Labor voters.

The survey identified that:

- Only 53% of Labor voters in the Townsville region are committed to voting Labor at the next State election and will not change.
- 47% of Labor voters indicated that they are not *"bolted on"* to Labor, and could shift their support to another Party.
- These levels of *"softness"* in the Labor vote are present, regardless of affinity for guns:

	Hard	Soft
Labor voters who hold a gun license (or family or friends hold a gun license)	53%	47%
Labor voters who do not hold a gun license (and family and friends do not hold a gun license)	53%	47%

- This means that, if gun controls are a vote changing issue for Labor voters who have an affinity for guns, there is considerable potential for Labor voters to shift their vote away from Labor (on this issue or other important *"protest"* issues).

4.4 There is strong public support in the Townsville region for shooters' rights.

The question asked was:

Do you support or oppose the following people in Queensland being able to hold a gun license, with appropriate security checks and gun storage:			
	Support	Neutral / Undecided	Oppose
a) Farmers owning a shot gun for their farm work.....	1	2	3
b) Farmers owning a handgun for their farm work	1	2	3
c) Sporting shooters who belong to clubs and compete in target shooting competitions.....	1	2	3
d) Licensed recreational shooters who shoot feral pigs.....	1	2	3
e) Police officers wearing handguns while on duty.....	1	2	3
f) Security guards while on duty.....	1	2	3
g) Feral pest controllers licensed to shoot feral wild pigs.....	1	2	3

	Shooters segment		Total sample	
	% support	% oppose	% support	% oppose
a) Farmers owning a shot gun for their farm work	96%	4%	91%	3%
b) Farmers owning a handgun for their farm work.....	63%	26%	55%	34%
c) Sporting shooters who belong to clubs and compete in target shooting competitions.....	94%	5%	86%	7%
d) Licensed recreational shooters who shoot feral pigs.....	78%	16%	71%	17%
e) Police officers wearing handguns while on duty	98%	2%	97%	2%
f) Security guards while on duty.....	56%	30%	52%	33%
g) Feral pest controllers licensed to shoot feral wild pigs.....	97%	2%	89%	9%

These results show:

- “Across the board” majority support for gun use in all categories in the table above, in both the shooters segment as well as the general voting population in the Townsville region.
- The strongest support is for:
 - Farmers owning shotguns
 - Sporting shooters
 - Police
 - Licensed pest controllers.

4.5 Shooters' rights are strongly supported by both shooters and non-shooters

<u>% support</u>	Shooters segment	Non-shooters	Total
a) Farmers owning a shot gun for their farm work.....	96%	81%	91%
b) Farmers owning a handgun for their farm work.....	63%	46%	55%
c) Sporting shooters who belong to clubs and compete in target shooting competitions.....	94%	76%	86%
d) Licensed recreational shooters who shoot feral pigs.....	78%	63%	71%
e) Police officers wearing handguns while on duty	98%	96%	97%
f) Security guards while on duty	56%	47%	52%
g) Feral pest controllers licensed to shoot feral wild pigs.....	97%	79%	89%

This suggests that a “shooters’ rights” campaign against tighter gun controls would have broad-ranging support in the Townsville region.

4.6 Townsville region voters believe that the problem of illegal gun use is best dealt with by tackling offenders and suspects, not licensed gun owners.

The question asked was:

<p>Do you feel that the problem of illegal guns used by outlaw bikie gangs and criminals is best handled by stepping up police surveillance of known offenders and suspects, or giving more resources to Australian Customs to stop illegal gun imports, or dramatically increasing penalties for possession of illegal firearms, or giving police greater powers to search suspects' cars and premises for guns, or more restrictions that will affect all licensed gun owners?</p>			
	Best idea	Second best idea	Third best idea
a) Stepping up police surveillance of known offenders and suspects.....	1	1	1
b) More resources to Australian Customs to stop illegal gun imports.....	2	2	2
c) Much higher penalties for possession of illegal firearms.....	3	3	3
c) More police powers to search suspects' cars and premises .	4	4	4
d) More restrictions that will affect all legitimate gun owners.	5	5	5

The findings were:

	Best idea	Second best idea	Third best idea	Total "top 3 ideas"	"Rank"
a) Stepping up police surveillance of known offenders and suspects.....	29%	20%	19%	68%	3
b) More resources to Australian Customs to stop illegal gun imports.....	22%	29%	25%	74%	1
c) Much higher penalties for possession of illegal firearms.....	10%	20%	24%	54%	4
c) More police powers to search suspects' cars and premises.....	30%	22%	19%	71%	2
d) More restrictions that will affect all legitimate gun owners..	10%	4%	7%	21%	5

Out of the five strategies to deal with illegal gun use:

- 90% of voters in the Townsville region nominate a strategy other than placing more restrictions on licensed gun owners.
- Only 10% believe that more restrictions on licensed gun access is the answer.
- 30% believe that more police search powers is the best solution.
- 29% believe that greater police surveillance is the answer.
- 22% believe that Customs should be given more resources to stop illegal imports.
- 10% believe that tougher penalties is the answer.

Overall, Townsville voters believe that a 3-pronged strategy will be effective:

- More resources for Customs.
- More police powers to search suspects' cars and premises.
- Greater police surveillance of known offenders and suspects.

There is a clear recognition in these results that tougher laws (affecting all gun owners) will do little to influence those who do not respect the law.

The strategy that voters believe will work best is to cast a broader *“surveillance and search”* net involving Customs and police, to target law breakers.

There is a call for more police and Customs resources (or at least a shift in priorities or strategy), without further restrictions on the law-abiding majority.

Both the shooters segment and the non-shooters segment are in broad agreement on this strategy:

	Shooters					Non-shooters				
	Best idea	Second best idea	Third best idea	Total "top 3 ideas"	"Rank"	Best idea	Second best idea	Third best idea	Total "top 3 ideas"	"Rank"
a) Stepping up police surveillance of known offenders and suspects.....	29%	22%	22%	73%	2	28%	17%	15%	60%	3
b) More resources to Australian Customs to stop illegal gun imports.....	26%	29%	22%	75%	1	16%	29%	30%	75%	1
c) Much higher penalties for possession of illegal firearms.....	5%	27%	18%	50%	4	16%	11%	31%	58%	4
d) More police powers to search suspects' cars and premises.....	36%	13%	23%	72%	3	23%	33%	14%	70%	2
e) More restrictions that will affect all legitimate gun owners.....	5%	4%	11%	20%	5	16%	5%	3%	24%	5

These results suggest that the public would be concerned if Customs and the police were under-resourced to deal with the problem of illegal gun use, due to limited available resources being used to police licensed gun owners instead of pursuing criminals.

4.7 The survey shows strong support for the rights of gun owners, with zero-tolerance for trouble-makers who break the law.

The question asked was:

Do you support or oppose the following:			
	Support	Neutral / Undecided	Oppose
a) Giving police and customs greater resources to tackle violent bikie groups and criminals who deal in illicit drugs.....	1	2	3
b) Law abiding Queenslanders having the right to own a gun for sporting or recreational or farming purposes	1	2	3
c) Gun owners having the right to be listened to by the State Government when reviews of gun laws are taking place.....	1	2	3

	Total sample results			
	Support	Neutral	Oppose	“Net” support
a) Giving police and customs greater resources to tackle violent bikie groups and criminals who deal in illicit drugs	90%	4%	6%	+84%
b) Law abiding Queenslanders having the right to own a gun for sporting or recreational or farming purposes	67%	16%	17%	+50%
c) Gun owners having the right to be listened to by the State Government when reviews of gun laws are taking place.....	74%	12%	14%	+60%

Three important observations about these results:

- Support for the right to own a gun is high (67%).
- Support for the rights of gun owners to be listened to by the State Government is even higher (74%).
- The “*bikies and criminals*” message (90% support) is also about rights, namely “*the right of law abiding Australians (Queenslanders) to be protected from the activities of outlaw bikie gangs and criminal elements.*”

4.8 There is wide-ranging opposition in the Townsville region population to applying greater restrictions or more policing to licensed gun owners.

The question asked was:

Would you support or oppose the Queensland Government doing the following things?			
	Support	Neutral / Undecided	Oppose
a) Banning Queensland farmers from keeping their handguns.....	1	2	3
b) Banning a range of currently legal guns and making legal gun owners hand them in.....	1	2	3
c) Making it more costly with more bureaucratic red tape for law abiding Queenslanders to get a gun license or keep their guns.....	1	2	3
d) Targeting legitimate gun owners instead of targeting bkie gangs and criminals.....	1	2	3
e) Changing gun laws to make it harder for legitimate gun owners but doing nothing extra to stop illegal guns getting into the hands of bkie gangs and criminals.....	1	2	3

The overall sample results were:

	Support	Neutral	Oppose	“Net” support
a) Banning Queensland farmers from keeping their handguns	22%	19%	59%	-37%
b) Banning a range of currently legal guns and making legal gun owners hand them in.....	29%	24%	47%	-18%
c) Making it more costly with more bureaucratic red tape for law abiding Queenslanders to get a gun license or keep their guns.....	36%	15%	49%	-13%
d) Targeting legitimate gun owners instead of targeting bkie gangs and criminals	17%	11%	72%	-55%
e) Changing gun laws to make it harder for legitimate gun owners but doing nothing extra to stop illegal guns getting into the hands of bkie gangs and criminals.....	14%	7%	79%	-65%

In the overall sample, the strongest opposition is to:

- Changing gun laws to make it harder for legitimate gun owners while doing nothing extra to stop the illegal gun trade (79% opposed).
- Targeting the “good guys” instead of targeting the “bad guys” (72% opposed).
- Banning Queensland farmers from keeping their handguns (59% opposed).
- 49% are also opposed to “more red tape” making it harder to obtain or keep a gun.
- 47% are also opposed to banning a range of currently legal guns.

The level of opposition is relatively stronger in the shooters’ segment than in the non-shooters’ segment:

	Shooters			Non-shooters		
	Support	Oppose	“Net”	Support	Oppose	“Net”
a) Banning Queensland farmers from keeping their handguns.....	19%	76%	-57%	27%	40%	-13%
b) Banning a range of currently legal guns and making legal gun owners hand them in	18%	63%	-45%	42%	27%	+15%
c) Making it more costly with more bureaucratic red tape for law abiding Queenslanders to get a gun license or keep their guns	28%	61%	-33%	44%	36%	+8%
d) Targeting legitimate gun owners instead of targeting bikie gangs and criminals.....	20%	68%	-48%	12%	77%	-65%
e) Changing gun laws to make it harder for legitimate gun owners but doing nothing extra to stop illegal guns getting into the hands of bikie gangs and criminals.....	7%	86%	-79%	23%	70%	-57%

Two important observations here are that:

- Opposition in the shooters segment is very strong, in relation to all of the extra restrictions – the shooters segment clearly do not support any “*bracket creep*” in relation to gun laws.
- Opposition in the non-shooters segment is softer for the first three initiatives in the table above (although there is still some sympathy for gun owners felt by the non-shooters segment), but opposition is very strong among non-shooters to any failure to tackle illegal gun issues because they can have a negative impact on the community at large.

Labor voters show a sufficient level of concern about these issues to suggest that at least some would respond to a call to action to change their vote on these issues:

	Labor voters					
	Labor shooters			Labor non-shooters		
	Support	Oppose	"Net"	Support	Oppose	"Net"
a) Banning Queensland farmers from keeping their handguns.....	28%	62%	-34%	46%	10%	+36%
b) Banning a range of currently legal guns and making legal gun owners hand them in.....	25%	40%	-15%	56%	15%	+41%
c) Making it more costly with more bureaucratic red tape for law abiding Queenslanders to get a gun license or keep their guns	16%	57%	-41%	63%	38%	+25%
d) Targeting legitimate gun owners instead of targeting bikie gangs and criminals.....	20%	72%	-52%	27%	73%	-46%
e) Changing gun laws to make it harder for legitimate gun owners but doing nothing extra to stop illegal guns getting into the hands of bikie gangs and criminals.....	14%	82%	-68%	30%	49%	-19%

A significant proportion of Labor voters with an affinity for guns oppose further restrictions.

A significant proportion of Labor voters with no affinity for guns oppose lack of stronger action by the State Government on illegal guns, bikies and criminals while taking the easy option of ramping up compliance rules for licensed gun owners.

4.9 Is the idea of further restrictions on gun ownership in Queensland a vote changer for the next Queensland State election?

For Labor voters:

- 12% indicated that they could shift their vote from Labor if new restrictions impacted on gun owners' rights.
- 63% indicated that they would not change their vote.
- 25% are undecided, "*depending on the changes that are proposed*".

This is a total of 37% of Labor voters who potentially could change their vote away from Labor if gun laws were made more restrictive in Queensland.

The result is stronger among Labor voters with an affinity for guns:

	Own a gun, or family or friend owns a gun	Do not own a gun and no family or friend owns a gun
Would change my vote if gun laws were tightened	20%	2%
Would not change my vote	55%	73%
Undecided / wait to see	25%	25%
Total could /probably change on this issue	45%	27%

4.10 Not only would this issue cause a loss of primary votes for Labor in Queensland, but it would also be likely to cause a loss of preferences from minor Parties.

	One Nation voters	Greens voters	KAP voters	Other voters	Hard undecided voters	Total minor Party voters
Would direct preferences to Labor with tightened gun laws	11%	69%	11%	6%	4%	18%
Would direct preferences away from Labor if they tightened gun laws	55%	0%	71%	70%	42%	51%
Undecided / wait to see	34%	31%	18%	24%	54%	31%
Total might direct preferences away from Labor	89%	31%	89%	94%	96%	82%

These results show a strong potential for the issue of new gun restrictions on licensed gun owners to affect preference flows, with strong evidence in the research findings that Labor could lose substantial preference flows on this issue.

The current poll suggests that only 44% of minor Party voters at the most would direct their preferences to Labor if Labor ran a campaign that included a restriction of gun owners' current rights (while doing nothing about bikies and criminals).

The Labor Party needs at least 47% of minor Party preferences, with no loss of primary votes on the issue of guns, in order to hold these three Townsville seats.

Further erosion of gun owners' rights, with a well-resourced campaign in favour of gun owners' rights, has the potential to cause these three Townsville seats to change hands.

4.11 Townsville region voters strongly support getting tough on bikies and criminals on illegal firearm use without adding greater restrictions, red tape or costs for law abiding gun owners.

The question asked was:

Do you agree or disagree with the idea of finding ways to launch a much tougher crackdown on illegal firearm users including bikie gangs and criminals without adding more restrictions and more bureaucratic red tape and more costs for legitimate recreational users of firearms?	
Agree.....	1
Disagree.....	2
Neutral.....	3

The overall sample results were:

Agree	84%
Disagree	5%
Neutral	11%
Total	100%

There is overwhelming support for the State Government getting its priorities right on this issue, and not restricting the rights of the majority as a strategy to capture those operating outside of the law.

4.12 The interest in guns , or association with people who own guns, is very high in the Townsville region.

	Own a gun or know someone who does	Use a gun or know someone who does
Mundingburra	61%	54%
Thuringowa	58%	63%
Townsville	43%	48%
LNP voters	63%	63%
ALP voters	53%	51%
Greens voters	59%	56%
One Nation voters	38%	50%
Katter’s Australian Party voters	74%	70%
Other voters	35%	42%
Hard undecided voters	43%	39%
Total	54%	55%

This means that issues affecting gun owners and affecting those who have friends / family with guns will be relevant to at least 50% of the population in the Townsville region.