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NSW Faces Backlash Over Gun Law Deal Legalizing Silencers

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The New South Wales (NSW) government is facing growing scrutiny over proposed firearm law changes that would allow the legal use of suppressors (commonly referred to as silencers) for certain gun license holders. Critics argue the reforms risk weakening Australia's longstanding gun control framework and compromising national safety standards established after the 1996 Port Arthur massacre.

The reforms, reportedly supported by firearm lobby groups and under consideration by the government led by NSW Premier Chris Minns, include permitting Category C license holders—typically rural landowners and pest controllers—to legally acquire suppressors and easing some existing restrictions on firearm ownership. These measures, if

implemented, would diverge from key provisions of the National Firearms Agreement (NFA), the bipartisan compact forged after Port Arthur to reduce gun violence.

Defense and policing experts warn that such changes may undermine Australia's global reputation for strict firearms regulation and could present challenges for state and federal security coordination. Former Prime Minister John Howard, architect of the NFA, reaffirmed in recent comments to ABC News that the ban on silencers was central to disarming the community of weapons with criminal utility. "Undoing those reforms would be a grave error," Howard said.

The Australian Institute of Criminology reports a 45% reduction in gun-related deaths since the NFA's implementation. NSW currently holds the largest number of registered firearms nationally—over 1.1 million as of 2025. A 2024 Gun Control Australia study has raised alarm about the potential consequences of further deregulation.

The NSW Opposition has also raised security concerns, citing a reported rise in illegal firearms seizures in 2024, with 2,300 weapons confiscated. Shadow Police Minister Mark Speakman called for a comprehensive review of the proposals, warning that any relaxation of laws must be accompanied by increased intelligence coordination and law enforcement resources.

Premier Minns has defended the reforms as aimed at supporting rural firearm users and improving efficiency in licensing, but critics argue the process lacked public consultation and transparency. Greens MP Sue Higgs and other legislators warn that the shift risks politicizing gun control, an issue with major public safety implications.