



## SAGA FACT SHEET EDUCATION SERIES

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**# 506**

# MODIFICATIONS TO FIREARMS – Understanding the Law on Altering Barrel Lengths and Related Changes under the Firearms Control Act

## Why This Matters

South African firearm owners often ask whether they may legally cut down or otherwise modify a firearm barrel, particularly with shotguns. The Firearms Control Act 60 of 2000 (FCA) makes this an area of control: some modifications are flatly prohibited; others require written authorisation and only a licensed gunsmith may perform them.

*This Fact Sheet sets out what the Firearm Control Act says, what the exceptions are and what procedure firearm owners must follow.*

## 1. Altering Barrel Length – Permission Required

- FCA Section 4(1): Any firearm with a barrel altered in length without the Registrar's written permission is classified as a prohibited firearm.
- Practical meaning: Cutting, shortening, or extending a barrel without prior written approval makes the firearm unlawful to possess.

***Note: You may not change a firearm's barrel length unless you get explicit written permission from the Registrar. If you alter the barrel length without this, your firearm becomes a prohibited firearm and a prohibited firearm cannot be licenced.***

## 2. Narrow Exception – Incidental Work by a Gunsmith

The Act recognises one limited exception: incidental alterations carried out only by a licensed gunsmith in the ordinary course of their work, provided the intention is not to alter the barrel length.

*Example: If a gunsmith removes minimal material while polishing a chamber or repairing a muzzle, this is not considered a violation.*

However, cutting down a barrel is not incidental – the purpose is to alter its length, so the exception does not apply!

## **Only a Licensed Gunsmith May Alter Firearm Barrels**

Section 59(1) of the FCA makes it unlawful for anyone without a gunsmith's licence to:

- alter the firing mechanism to discharge more than one shot,
- alter the calibre,
- alter the barrel length, or
- remove or alter identifying marks.

***Note: Even with the Registrar's permission, the work must only be done by a qualified licensed gunsmith.***

## **The Official Process (SAPS 531 & SAPS 521[g])**

If you intend to lawfully modify or replace a firearm barrel:

### ***1. Apply in Advance:***

- Complete SAPS Form 531 "Request to alter firearm by a gunsmith".
- Submit through your Designated Firearms Officer (DFO) with supporting documents:
  - Detailed motivation for the alteration,
  - Licensed gunsmith's report,
  - Certified copies of your ID and firearm licence,
  - If replacing a barrel: an affidavit about the lawful disposal of the old barrel, plus a post-firing test affidavit.

### ***2. After Modification***

- Once the work is complete, submit SAPS Form 521(g) to record the changes.
- A new firearm licence card reflecting the modification must be issued before you may take possession of the altered firearm.

## **Summary Table**

| <u>Action</u>                            | <u>Legal Position under FCA</u>                                           |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Cutting/shortening shotgun barrel</i> | Illegal unless Registrar's prior written permission obtained (s4)         |
| <i>Doing the work yourself</i>           | Illegal – must be done by a licensed gunsmith (s59)                       |
| <i>Incidental alteration by gunsmith</i> | Allowed only if not intended to alter barrel length (rare, narrow scope)  |
| <i>Lawful alteration / replacement</i>   | Requires SAPS Form 531 application, supporting docs, & SAPS 521(g) update |

## **Key Takeaways**

- Never cut down or alter a barrel yourself – it risks turning your firearm into a prohibited weapon.
- The Registrar's written permission is always required where barrel length is intentionally changed.
- Only licensed gunsmiths may perform such work.
- SAPS forms 531 and 521(g) must be completed and approved; you may not lawfully reclaim the firearm until your reissued licence has been approved and issued.

*E & OE*

***Issued as part of the SAGA Educational Series to guide firearm owners on compliance and responsible firearm ownership.***

### **Acknowledgements:**

1. Drafted by SMS Lyle, research by Co-Piot
2. SAPS regulations & procedures
3. Sections 4 & 59, Firearms Control Act 60 of 2000, as amended



### **SAGA: The SA Gunowners' Association**

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# *Annexure*

## **Section 4, Firearms Control Act 60 of 2000 as amended**

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### **4 Prohibited Firearms**

(1) The following firearms and devices are prohibited firearms and may not be possessed or licensed in terms of **this Act**, except as provided for in sections 17, 18 (5), 19 and 20 (1) (b):

- (a) Any **fully automatic firearm**;
- (b) any gun, cannon, recoilless gun, mortar, light mortar or launcher manufactured to fire a rocket, grenade, self-propelled grenade, bomb or explosive device;
- (c) any frame, body or barrel of such a fully automatic firearm, gun, cannon, recoilless gun, mortar, light mortar or launcher;
- (d) any projectile or rocket manufactured to be discharged from a cannon, recoilless gun or mortar, or rocket launcher;
- (e) any imitation of any device contemplated in paragraph (b), (c) excluding the frame, body or barrel of a fully automatic firearm, or (d);
- (f) any firearm-
  - (i) the mechanism of which has been altered so as to enable the discharging of more than one shot with a single depression of the trigger;
  - (ii) the **calibre** of which has been altered without the written permission of the **Registrar**;
  - (iii) the barrel length of which has been altered without the written permission of the Registrar;
  - (iv) the serial number or any other identifying mark of which has been changed or removed without the written permission of the Registrar.

(2) For purposes of subsection (1) (f) (iii), the incidental alteration of the length of the barrel of a firearm by a **gunsmith** in the ordinary course of a gunsmith's work which does not have as an objective the alteration of the length of the barrel of that firearm must not be regarded as an alteration contemplated in that subsection.

- (3) (a) The **Minister** may, by notice in the Gazette, declare any other firearm of a specified type to be a prohibited firearm if it is-
- (i) in the interest of public safety; or
  - (ii) desirable for the maintenance of law and order.
- (b) A notice contemplated in paragraph (a) must be tabled in Parliament at least 14 days before publication thereof if Parliament is then sitting, and if Parliament is not sitting, within seven days after the commencement of the next sitting.
- (c) A notice contemplated in paragraph (a) is of full force and effect until withdrawn by the Minister or by a resolution of Parliament.

### **59 Prohibition of certain work**

No person may, without being the holder of a **gunsmith's** licence or being registered as an apprentice to such holder-

- (a) alter the mechanism of a **firearm** so as to enable the discharging of more than one shot with a single depression of the trigger;
- (b) alter the **calibre** of a firearm;
- (c) alter the barrel length of a firearm;
- (d) alter or remove the serial number or any other identifying mark of a firearm; or
- (e) perform such other work as may be **prescribed**.