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Mr David Stanton TD  
Minister of State  
Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform  
94 St Stephen's Green  
Dublin 2.

19<sup>th</sup> of February, 2018.

**Re: Firearms Consultative Panel**

Dear Minister,

I refer to a proposed meeting of the Firearms Consultative Panel (FCP) which you intend to convene on Thursday next 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

The members of the Sports Coalition are deeply concerned that it appears you intend to conduct a meeting concerning the composition of the membership of the FCP which we can only deduce from statements made publicly a member NGO that the meeting is being called at their behest.

The Sports Coalition has played a fulsome supporting and cooperative role on the FCP since it was reconvened by Minister Fitzgerald. In all that time we have moved on numerous occasions to ensure cooperation and compliance with the rule of law while supporting the initiatives of you and your officials at all times.

We were forced to make two formal complaints about what we believe were admitted actions in effectively supporting and covering up illegal use of firearms and also the unlawful use of the Garda Logo. Both of these matters were committed in the full glare of senior officers of An Garda Siochana who chose to do nothing about them, forcing the Sports Coalition to make formal complaints. Those matters are currently under criminal investigation by An Garda Siochana, but not before at least some attempts were made by An Garda Siochana to side-step the issues. I believe you are aware of that already from the contents of correspondence which was sent to the writer by your secretary on your behalf.

The work of the FCP has been totally disrupted for the last year. Another matter of grave public safety concern was frustrated by the public misrepresentation and falsehoods in the face of silence from you and your Department. I refer here to the issue of night shooting and the inherent dangers associated with it. This matter was first raised as a serious public safety issue by the NPWS representative and the Gardai. Ireland is the only country in Europe which allows this practice without any regulation as would be appropriate to discharging a gun in the countryside at night time. When a sub group of the FCP met and drafted a best practice voluntary code, it was castigated in publications and on social media with claims which were entirely false. The Sports Coalition and some of our personnel were personally vilified while your Department remained silent instead of vindicating the work undertaken on its behalf.

That we would now be expected to sit around a table on a committee appointed to advise the Minister of the day in relation to the administration of the firearms licensing code and firearms policy, with people who are the subject of criminal investigation in relation to matters of illegal use of firearms, is a step too far. This NGO has bullied its way to membership of the FCP and from its public utterances, it would appear that it intends to continue in what it regards as a winning formula to get its own way. These people should have been asked to step aside until such time as the outcome of the Garda investigations are brought to a conclusion, including any prosecutions as might be necessary. Incredibly, this has not happened. May I remind you of the number of times the Sports Coalition was admonished by senior members of An Garda Síochána and your own Department about the dangers associated with ownership and use of firearms in the run-up to the final resolution of the licensing impasse which had developed prior to the Autumn of 2015. As was subsequently revealed, much of the basis for those warnings and criticism was unfounded. This makes the apparent tolerance of this NGO at meetings of the FCP while under criminal investigation in relation to firearms matters all the more inexplicable.

The Sports Coalition has in contrast always tried to face up to its responsibilities, both legal and civil by providing leadership when sometimes hard decisions required to be explained, justified and accepted. We have never been found shying away from our responsibilities. We now see the total rupturing of the FCP rendering it unable to achieve anything. The big prize it could and should have progressed, the establishment of the Firearms Licensing Authority, has all but been abandoned. We have no evidence of any substantive work having been done to progress this almost two and a half years after it was first announced.

Having discussed the current situation with our member organisations, it is clear they have all lost confidence in the FCP or that any effort will be made to properly confront those who are prepared to ignore the norms of the law and behaviour. It is therefore with regret that I must give you notice of the Sports Coalition's decision not to attend this meeting of the FCP while you and/or your Department continue to entertain people who are prepared to give support to others who break the law with firearms. I should remind you Minister that the incidents which have been supported by this NGO are incidents which would in normal

course warrant the revocation of an existing firearms certificate or a refusal to grant a certificate.

Yours sincerely,

*Paul a. Walsh.*\_\_\_\_\_

Paul Walsh,  
Chairperson Sports Coalition.

c.c. All members of the FCP