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Rec shooting fails to spin big bucks

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EXCLUSIVE

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It was the controversial, taxpayer-funded analysis of recreational hunting and shooting intended to demonstrate health benefits and a billion-dollar contribution to the economy.

But the consultants who undertook the \$165,000 analysis, at the behest of Deputy National Party leader and avid shooter Bridget McKenzie, have instead left doubts over the sector and suggested its economic contribution is just \$335m.

Senator McKenzie commissioned the analysis when she was minister for rural health and sport, to ascertain its impact on the economy, health, wellbeing and social cohesion.

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia had lobbied for such work to be undertaken, worried that the sector — partly

legitimised by the Howard gun laws — might be at risk from ongoing community campaigns to reduce gun violence.

And although the SSAA believed shooting had become a billion-dollar sport, the consultants took a different view.

In an analysis completed this month, RM Consulting Group criticised a previous estimate of the gross economic benefit of \$800mn and put the net figure at \$335m, with 3300 jobs.

Part of the difference came down to the consequences of any ban on hunting and shooting.

"If hunting and shooting were prohibited, hunters and shooters would redirect their expenditure to other goods and services, and in many cases to similar outdoor activities such as camping, fishing, four-wheel-driving and so on," the consultants concluded.

The SSAA helped direct members to an online survey that provided data for the analysis, showing shooters and hunters were more active and had higher

levels of wellbeing than the general population — rising with the frequency of their hunting and shooting.

Yet the consultants could not ascertain whether "shooting is responsible for the higher levels of physical activity and wellbeing, or some other reason", suggesting participants might already need to be fit to be outdoors.

More than 16,500 people completed the survey, of an estimated 640,000 recreational hunters and shooters in Australia. However, the consultants left some doubt over the number of participants and how often they participated.

It was "crucial to the estimates of economic impact and the major source of uncertainty in this study", the consultants said, and future work "should focus on establishing a reliable and unbiased estimate".

The SSAA purports to have almost 200,000 members. Senator McKenzie, now the Agriculture Minister, could not be contacted for comment on Sunday.