

CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE STATE OF QUEENSLAND INC



A Member Organisation of CWLA Inc.

For the Honour and Glory of God

63 Point Cartwright Drive, BUDDINA. Q 4575

Parliament of Queensland

Weapons and Other Legislation (Firearms Offences) Amendment Bill 2019

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Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"

Mathew 26:52-54

1. Introduction

Catholic Women's League Queensland Inc. is a non-governmental organisation and a member organisation of the Catholic Women's League Australia Inc (CWLA), the national peak body representing the League's six member organisations located throughout Australia. One of CWLA's four principle aims is to influence legislative and administrative bodies at all levels of government in order to preserve the dignity of the human person. Given our focus we feel compelled to contribute a submission to this particular inquiry. Our role includes advocating for disadvantaged groups of women and their children, at local, State and Commonwealth levels; providing practical, physical support, in our own country and to overseas communities and lobbying Government – both Federal and State – on behalf of the marginalised.

2. Catholic Social Teaching

The CWL State of Queensland looks to the Catholic Church's social teaching, which is a rich source of wisdom and guidance about building a just society and living an ethical life amidst the challenges of modern society. Our social teachings are articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents.

One important social teaching theme relates to that of the "life and dignity of the human person". The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral and ethical vision for society.

3. Human Rights Framework

There are a number of international human rights instruments, which support the rights of all human beings, which can be threatened by the use of weapons without good cause. These are as follows:

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states unequivocally that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person".

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states at Article 6 (1) that "every human being has the inherent right to life"; that "this right shall be protected by law"; and "that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life". The preamble states that human rights 'derive from the inherent dignity of the human person', aimed at achieving 'freedom from fear and want'. We believe that human rights are the opposite of guns. Amnesty International has called gun violence in the US as a "human rights crisis"¹. Thus, the possession of fire arms by civilians is clearly a human rights issue.

In light of the human rights framework detailed above human life should be protected and never be curtailed prematurely through the use of guns.

¹ < <https://castancentre.com/2016/03/16/what-does-human-rights-law-say-about-gun-control/>> last viewed at 27 May 2019.

4. Firearm Prohibition Orders (FPO)

The proposed Bill intends to include a new part 5A relating to a 'Firearms prohibition orders' (FPO) into the *Weapons Act 1990*. The FPO objective is to prevent a high risk person from acquiring, possessing or using a firearm. Under the framework the Commissioner may make an FPO order against a person who is believed to either be a person not fit, in the public interest, to have possession of a firearm; or the person is a participant in a criminal organisation within the meaning of the *Penalties and Sentences Act 1962* or is subject to a control order under that Act.

We believe that, in light of the Port Arthur massacre that occurred in 1996, it has become clear that access to firearms needs to be restricted to certain persons with high risk profiles. This could include people with mental health illness or conditions; and people with criminal backgrounds or involved with criminal organisations. From the various massacres that have involved firearms throughout the world, the common denominator is often a person with a mental health illness or condition, who should never have had access to the firearms in the first place. The use of firearms needs to be restricted to various specific persons, so that we can ensure that the public at large are safe. People such as police officers; defence personnel; farmers; hunters; target shooting athletes etcetera. Such individuals have legitimate reasons for bearing firearms, are trained in the use of responsible firearm use and for specific purposes. It is people who have no reason for holding firearms for any legitimate or reasonable purpose, who should be monitored and/or prevented from accessing firearms. Providing the Commissioner to make such assessments is a good idea, and one which we fully support.

To quote the former Australian Prime Minister John Howard in his CBS interview:

"People used to say to me, 'You violated my human rights by taking away my gun', and I'd (say), 'I understand that. Will you please understand the argument, the greatest human right of all is to live at safe life without fear of random murder'².

But the right to bear arms is not a human right and is not detailed in any of the international human rights conventions as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which contains all of the fundamental human rights that underpin the human rights framework.

² < <https://castancentre.com/2016/03/16/what-does-human-rights-law-say-about-gun-control/>> last viewed at 26 May 2019.

Since the massacre in Port Arthur and the banning of semi-automatic weapons, Australia has not witnessed another gun massacre. Not one. The tightening of gun laws in Australia has been of great benefit to the Australian public. The tweaking of these laws at a state/territorial level is necessary to ensure that people who should not be bearing arms are stopped from doing so.

The idea of introducing a FPO is therefore one that would assist substantially in providing further protection to the public. We therefore are in agreement with the introduction of this Bill and wish the committee well in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

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Living the Joy of the Gospel

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