



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 11 November 1998

WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—ONP) (Leader of the One Nation Party) (10.10 a.m.): I move—
"That the Bill be now read a second time."

Today represents a historic occasion for the firearm owners of Queensland. I will now introduce to the Parliament One Nation's private member's Bill to amend the Weapons Act 1990 which will return some commonsense and sanity to the firearms debate. Firstly, let me reiterate our philosophy on firearm ownership. We believe firearms should only be acquired and used by fit and proper and licensed persons, and our policy reflects this. We also believe that licensed firearm owners should not be treated like criminals, should not be harassed by Government departments, and should not be subject to unnecessary regulation or intrusion into their day-to-day activities. Most importantly, we believe firearm owners must not be blamed and punished for things that are not their fault.

One Nation's policy is based on the following principles—

that shooting is a legitimate sport and pastime and participants should be treated accordingly;

that Australians have the right to defend themselves and their families in their own homes;

that disarming law abiding Australians is not in the national interest and will do nothing to reduce crime.

In addition, the existing Weapons Act has grown to be an administrative nightmare and very wasteful of police resources which would be far better utilised in fighting real criminals.

On the subject of crime, the number of robberies involving firearms jumped 39% last year according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures as reported in the Sunday Mail on 18 October 1998. In the same article a criminologist expressed surprise and bafflement at the increase and tried to explain it away. The reason why armed robbery has increased despite the buy-back is that the criminals did not hand in their guns, only honest people did.

This Bill contains a number of new initiatives designed to ensure that only fit and proper persons can legally own and operate firearms in Queensland, and at the same time reward law-abiding firearm owners by sensibly amending many provisions in the current Act. We support the existing 28-day cooling off period and we agree with compulsory theoretical and practical training before a licence is issued. This legislation will establish a Prohibited Persons Register of persons who are not fit and proper to hold a licence or possess a weapon.

Under this legislation, a doctor or psychologist must report a condition or illness, which for the purpose of this Bill would make a person unsuitable to obtain or hold a firearms licence or weapon. This person will be placed on the register and will remain on the register until cleared by a doctor or psychologist. In addition, a domestic violence order, other than a temporary protection order, will continue to prevent a person from obtaining or holding a licence or weapon for five years after the expiry of the order.

A person who has been convicted of any of the following offences in Queensland or elsewhere will not be able to obtain or hold a firearm licence or weapon within five years from the time of the conviction—

a non-indictable offence relating to the misuse of drugs;

a non-indictable offence involving the use, or threatened use of violence;

a non-indictable offence involving the use, carriage, discharge or possession of a weapon.

The conviction for an indictable offence in Queensland or elsewhere will mean a ban for life against obtaining or holding a licence or firearm.

We strongly support the concept of self-defence, and so in this Bill defence of a person or the person's family in the person's place of residence will be a valid reason to obtain a firearms licence subject, of course, to satisfying all other requirements under the Act.

Under this legislation, a fit and proper person, once obtaining a firearms licence, which is issued for life subject to good behaviour, will be able to acquire a Category A, B or C class weapon. A permit to acquire will not be required for Category A, B or C class weapons. Category A, B and C class weapons will not have to be traded through a licensed dealer, but a person must not acquire a weapon unless licensed, nor may a person sell or dispose of a weapon to an unlicensed person. Category D and H weapons will require a permit to purchase and membership of an appropriate organisation or another acceptable reason to acquire and hold as defined under the Act.

Interstate residents moving to Queensland will have to satisfy all additional requirements under this Bill before being issued with a licence. The time limit to obtain a Queensland licence is 14 days for Category A, B or C weapons, and seven days to obtain a licence for Category D and H weapons. The commissioner will have to maintain a firearms register for Category D and H weapons only. Information on the firearms register can only be released by the commissioner to the chief executive of the Police Service of the Commonwealth or another State for a valid purpose as defined under this Bill.

This Bill will also remove the anomaly whereby someone legally acting in self-defence may nevertheless still be guilty of an offence under the Weapons Act. Likewise, practical amendments have been made to make the transportation of an uncovered firearm in a vehicle legal in certain circumstances.

This Bill will also establish a community liaison committee to provide advice to the Minister on the administration of the Act. Establishment of the committee is provided for in the current Act, but for some reason the committee has never been established. The committee will consist of nominated representatives from various interest groups who will be appointed by the Minister. This committee should provide a valuable interface between Government and the public on the administration of the Act and firearms issues in general.

This Bill is a sensible compromise and will stop unsuitable persons from accessing firearms legally and will allow law-abiding firearm owners to go about their business with a minimum of Government interference.

I commend the Bill to the house.
