



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 5 August 1998

SPORTING SHOOTERS

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (6.11 p.m.): It is my pleasure to second the motion moved by the member for Keppel. I ask the Government to get on with the job that we started, that is, to identify suitable land in State forest, or unallocated State land, for the establishment of gun clubs in this State. The huge population growth in Queensland and, in particular, south-east Queensland and the coastal belt has made it very difficult for sporting groups to find suitable land on which to start up or expand. Most groups that approach the Government for land get knocked back. Although Governments should not be expected to find land for every group that comes along, they must do their best for those groups. I have had many sporting groups come to me seeking land—gun clubs, golf clubs, tennis clubs, bike clubs, sporting clubs, horse clubs and so on. I took the view that the Government did not ban the general use of golf clubs, tennis racquets and the like. However, Governments did ban the use of guns unless gun owners either get permission to shoot on a rural property or join a gun club. Geographically, urban residents look towards joining a gun club.

We have a responsibility to act in the interests of the community. The gun laws that were forced upon us by Canberra dictate generally that those who do not live on the land or cannot get permission to shoot on a rural property have to join a gun club. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to work out that firearm owners wish to keep their guns and, therefore, need to join a gun club. The deputations that I received as Minister quite clearly had explored every avenue available to them to obtain suitable land. I found it quite reasonable to look at State forest land, and maybe unallocated State land, to assist the strong community demand to find suitable land on which gun clubs can operate safely. I saw no great impact on State forests, no legal implications, no safety problems and no legislative implications. In fact, I believe that gun clubs and State forest land go hand in hand; it is out of the way of the general public, there are no noise problems or safety problems, there are buffers, and there is no damage to the environment. In countries such as Sweden and England, the public have access to State forests. They can hunt and camp anywhere in those forests. In Sweden, they hunt reindeer in the State forests. They encourage people to go there. So it is possible to have the two things operating together and side by side.

The intention was to look for inferior pieces of land that may not be as productive as other areas. There will always be stony ridges or inferior soil types that do not produce good timber. Large areas of land will not be required. After all, a rifle range need be only several hundred metres long and maybe 100 metres wide. I do not envisage any large-scale clearing, except perhaps for clubhouses and parking areas, or even when several ranges are needed—depending on the size of the property. Generally speaking, not a great deal of land would be involved with some of those clubs. Timber can be left standing in the buffer zones. In fact, that timber could even be logged, if people so desired that. I am sure that the Government could work out a deal with gun clubs so that the land right up to the very edge of the range could be used productively.

There are no legal implications to this. The Forestry Act clearly allows land to be revoked under sections 26 and/or 32. I took this matter so seriously that I presented to Cabinet a submission outlining the plan: it was quite clear that the Government caused the problem and, therefore, the Government should fix the problem. The Labor Party gave unanimous support to the Weapons Act in this House. It now has the responsibility to assist in fixing the problem.

In the delegations that I received from gun clubs and the Sporting Shooters Association, I could clearly see the frustration they faced. Thousands of people wished to join those clubs, but they had nowhere to go. My instructions to the Department of Natural Resources were to assist in the identification of suitable sites under the guidelines that I have outlined. It did take a bit of kick-starting of the department on this issue. This became obvious when the Courier-Mail was alerted by my directive. When the member for Warwick took over as Minister, he set up a ministerial advisory panel to make it happen.

Time expired.
