



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 5 August 1998

SPORTING SHOOTERS

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.36 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment, recognising that indeed there has been a large increase in the membership of gun clubs. In the words of Minister Springborg of March this year, such members must be able to shoot responsibly in well-managed sites with secure buffer zones away from urban areas. The Minister also indicated that the sites being sought were to be up to 250 hectares in size—large enough to accommodate such activities appropriately.

I believe that it is appropriate that a Minister should have an advisory panel to identify such sites, such as we are discussing tonight in this motion, because shooting ranges, wherever they are located, can as we all very well know cause controversy in the community. It is essential that such an advisory panel protect the Minister from the intense lobbying that can occur from gun clubs or the shooters association.

In the past, if this regime had been in place, then the scandalous situation that tonight I want to draw to the attention of the House would not have happened. I say "scandalous" because over the past five years the actions of the Mount Molloy Pistol Club, the Mareeba Shire Council and former Ministers Gilmore, Hobbs and Springborg have conspired to create a situation whereby 15 hectares of recreation reserve is being used for a rifle range—land that is totally inappropriate for that use.

In fact, back in 1996 that was Minister Hobbs' opinion when he was lobbied by the members of the pistol club with a petition. In a letter to the club, then Minister Hobbs said that he was—

"... bound by existing legislation in regard to this matter.

It is not appropriate for a trustee lease from Mareeba Shire Council over part of the Recreation Reserve to be issued due to safety considerations for the general public.

Section 57 of the Land Act 1994 requires that any lease entered into by the trustees of a reserve must first be approved 'in principle' by myself as Minister administering the Land Act or by my delegate."

Further, the Minister stated—

"Under these circumstances, I am not amenable to allowing the proposed trustee lease over the reserve.

It is not possible to excise from the Recreation Reserve an area meeting requirements for operating a pistol club."

Tom Gilmore accepted this situation, basically blaming the Mareeba Shire Council for an illegal situation. In a letter to the editor, he stated—

"This decision"—

of the Mareeba Shire Council to lease this land—

"was contrary to the State law (Lands Act) and the council's own by-laws."

What happened next was that the pistol club required a review. A review was duly carried out. In 1997, Minister Hobbs said in a letter—

"I accept that you acted in good faith in obtaining the approval of the Mareeba Shire Council and the Police Department for the club to operate on the reserve, but without an appropriate right to use the land by way of tenure under the Land Act, such usage was illegal."

The letter states further—

"Finally, I am still of the opinion that the decision made on this issue is the correct one even though it was not the outcome desired by your club."

One might have thought that would be the end of it, but it went further. A lot of lobbying went on. I believe that a lot of pressure was brought to bear on officers of the Department of Natural Resources and the Police Service.

Finally, at the bidding of the Minister, on 11 June, just two days before the election, under section 57 of the Lands Act a trustee lease was signed between the Mareeba Shire Council and the Far North Queensland Sports and Pistol Club. That occurred during the caretaker period of the former Government. It was described by the department as being "routine departmental business". No-one who knows the history of this issue could describe this as routine business. It is shameful! I really believe that this issue needs to be investigated thoroughly. I call on the Minister, who is currently looking into this matter, to find out what really happened.

At the time this lease was signed, changes were made at the very last moment. The purpose of the lease was changed from a pistol club to a firing range. All members should be aware of the implications of that change. It meant, among other things, that miniature cannons under 1.2 metres in length could be operated there as opposed to just pistols. Furthermore, there was an extension in the time of use from 13 hours a week to over 30 hours a week. Currently on the table of this House are proposed regulations to change the subordinate legislation to enable an increase of 25 in the allowable decibel level. Anyone who knows anything about noise and guns will appreciate that that is an incredibly significant increase. It would have a very considerable impact on the community. I believe that that lease should be cancelled and other available sites investigated.

Time expired.
