



Speech by

## Hon. V. LESTER

### MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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Hansard 5 August 1998

#### SPORTING SHOOTERS

**Hon. V. P. LESTER** (Keppel—NPA) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this House—

- (a) recognises the need for sporting shooters to be able to partake in their chosen sport in a safe and disciplined environment, and
- (b) calls on the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Natural Resources to retain the Ministerial Advisory Panel charged with finding suitable state forest land and unallocated Crown land for the establishment of rifle clubs."

Hardly four weeks have gone by before the Beattie Government has been exposed for its blatant, undiluted political opportunism. When the former coalition Government established a ministerial advisory panel to find suitable State forest and other Crown land for rifle clubs, the Premier—then as Opposition Leader—gave his support to that proposal. On 6 May he told the *Courier-Mail's* Michael Madigan that he had never opposed rifle ranges being built on Crown land or in State forests.

One can just imagine the surprise and bitter disappointment that gripped sporting shooters around Queensland earlier this week when they woke up to hear the new Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources telling listeners to ABC news that he was now reviewing the future of the advisory panel. This was backed up by the Minister yesterday in answer to a question that I asked him. I want to make it very clear that this panel is made up of different forms of shooting organisations and it is backed up by expert people from various departments.

If there was one message that came out of the recent State election it was, quite frankly, that people have had an absolute gutful of some politicians preaching one thing and then, given the opportunity, doing another. The Labor Party has been exposed for doing just that—and more so the Premier has been exposed.

When this House passed amendments to the Weapons Act in 1996 there was bipartisan political support for the most fundamental principle: the principle that all sporting shooters should be able to practise their chosen sport in a safe and disciplined environment. Even then, the shadow Minister for Police, the member for Waterford, acknowledged on 12 October that—

"Organisations that have long held the view that firearm ownership in Australia should be greatly restricted have accepted the needs of professional shooters, rural producers and their employees to use firearms as a legitimate tool in their business or employment."

He went on to say—

"They have accepted the legitimate rights of responsible citizens who are sporting shooters to own and use firearms in competition at shooting ranges."

The legitimate rights of responsible citizens! Tonight, I shall speak about the legitimate expectations of a responsible Parliament.

When national gun laws were introduced in 1996 they required some recreational shooters to belong to an approved shooters club as part of the criteria to obtain a gun licence. Increased membership of clubs was not something of their own making. The increased membership was not something that the clubs themselves had built up or even budgeted for. They had not done that because they did not think they would need to. Suddenly we had a reason for it to be done. It was an

increase in membership forced upon them by the Government and forced upon them by legislation supported by the Labor Party.

As a result, clubs are now struggling to offer facilities for their new members. Indeed, over 25 clubs across the State of Queensland simply do not have enough room to cope with the increased membership. On 24 March, the Courier-Mail estimated that the membership of sporting shooters organisations in Queensland had jumped from 10,000 to 50,000 members since the new gun laws were introduced. Honourable members can see where the problem is coming from. Membership of the Ipswich club alone jumped from 600 to 2,600 members. What is that club going to do?

It is not hard to understand why gun clubs across Queensland called on the Government to help find extra sites to enable them to expand. The options were clear-cut. I think all members would agree that we do not want a situation where clubs are building extra rifle ranges in residential areas. All members know the problems that that could cause. However, the State does possess a swag of State forests and other Crown land which may be suitable for rifle ranges. In late April, the then Minister for Natural Resources, Lawrence Springborg, announced that Cabinet had given approval for Crown land to be made available for rifle ranges, but Cabinet made one very clear stipulation: no national parks! Obviously the idea of using national parks was never the intention of the Government. It was imperative, however, that any identified sites met the very strict safety requirements that our community expects. Public safety is always of the utmost concern and it was vital that any proposed sites met with regulations approved by the Queensland Police Service.

For this reason, police were represented on the advisory panel, along with the Departments of Local Government and Planning, Natural Resources, Environment and Sport and Recreation. Equally, various rifle and pistol associations were represented. Everyone was given their chance to have their say and to come up with sound, sensible land allocation.

From a local viewpoint, I was very heartened indeed by the Minister's assurance that extra land for gun clubs in Rockhampton was to be a high priority. No doubt other clubs across the State were also heartened by the Government's commitment, particularly in Caboolture, Gladstone, Toowoomba, Clermont, Mareeba, Cairns, Townsville, Ingham, Bowen, Warwick and Gympie. Honourable members can see that this issue covered the whole State and a lot of people were affected. These were all areas which were experiencing trouble in finding additional sites.

They would also have been heartened by the comments of Mr Beattie when he assured readers of the Courier-Mail on 6 May that he did not oppose rifle ranges being built in State forests or on other Crown land. But now that assurance has been exposed as a cheap political trick. The new Minister is reviewing the future of the panel. The Minister's statement to that effect can be found in yesterday's Hansard. This has occurred just three months after his leader gave an assurance to sporting shooters across Queensland.

Let me make it very clear that this is not an issue of pandering to the gun lobby, as some people are trying to claim. Instead, it is an issue of the State Government fulfilling a moral obligation. It is about the State Government playing its part in alleviating the problems that sporting shooter clubs are experiencing as a direct result of Government legislation brought about by that awful tragedy at Port Arthur. It is also an issue of fulfilling community expectations that shooters should be able to have a safe and disciplined environment in which to practise their sport. To allow people to have a gun licence, yet not to ensure adequate rifle ranges are available, is as nonsensical as advocating that people can drive cars but providing no roads. That is how stupid it is.

This is an issue of integrity. This is a test of the integrity of the Premier and his Government. Indeed, it is a test of the Premier's leadership. It is a test to see whether or not the Premier will make one of his Ministers honour a very, very clear commitment given by him in the lead-up to the recent State election. It is a test to see whether the Labor Government has learnt anything from the election result.

It is great for people to be able to learn how to use firearms properly in a club, because they are taught properly and they are taught to respect the weapons. We all know about the huge problems that are created when we have rifle ranges near residential areas. Obviously, an application for such an activity attracts a lot of comment and many objections, and then the shooters club cannot get established. This is a huge problem. One particular club in the Livingstone Shire has experienced these problems.

Time expired.

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