



Speech by

JACK PAFF

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

Hansard 25 May 1999

WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PAFF (Ipswich West—ONP) (9.44 p.m.): I rise to refute the nonsense produced by the member for Springwood when this legislation was last debated. He referred to a target shooter who said on radio that there was no need for semiautomatic rifles in his discipline. That is correct. Semiautomatic firearms are not usually used in target shooting; they are not as accurate as bolt actions. The member for Springwood should know that, but he often shoots his mouth off without thinking. There are, however, legitimate uses of semiautomatic firearms, particularly in clay target shooting, in hunting and in training conducted by military rifle associations established under the Military Act 1903 to provide a pool of semitrained civilians to assist the regular forces in the event of war.

I refer to an article in the *Courier-Mail* of 11 June 1996 in which retired Air Commodore John Trinder said that Australia is incapable of defending itself and that we could not depend on the United States as commercial interests would probably outweigh friendships. This follows revelations in today's papers that our new Collins submarines are dangerous and that a large proportion of Army vehicles are unroadworthy. Everyone knows that our Army, containing only about 300 riflemen, is undersized and underfunded and incapable of defending our country, thanks to decades of cost cutting. Anyone who is monitoring NATO's war in the Balkans can see that high technology weaponry cannot replace manpower and, therefore, our civilian military rifle associations provide a valuable service to the country at no cost to the Government.

The member for Springwood says that he does not want Australia to become like America. It is too late, and he is part of the problem. The member for Springwood is a member of a party which is replacing Australian with American as fast as it can. Where did all our violence come from? Where have all our drug problems come from? Where has organised crime come from? Where did all our jobs and industries go? Just 25 years ago Australia was a safe country with full employment, low crime and no drug problems. All these problems have come from overseas and most of them have resulted from the Americanisation of our society, our industry, our media, our culture, our entertainment, our politics, our youth and our food, and especially our crime.

The member for Springwood is another member of this House who does not believe that self-defence is a valid reason to own a firearm. We disagree. Our strong view is that, provided the person is of good standing, we support their right to acquire firearms for whatever purpose, and we most strongly support anyone who is forced to defend themselves or their family with a firearm.

Regarding the member's disparaging comments about Article 2 of the American Constitution, we have our own Bill of Rights which is in force in Queensland and which clearly confers a right to keep an arm for self-defence, and the sooner that right is upheld by a court the better. Our police force is overstressed and cannot protect us, and we can expect more and more people to demand the ability and the means to defend themselves. As long as they are people of good standing, we will support them.

What would the member for Springwood do if a gang of drug crazed home invaders broke into his house and attacked his family? He would surely use any means at his disposal to protect himself, but unless he is a martial arts expert or unless he has a firearm, he is virtually helpless. The member for Springwood referred to the Port Arthur tragedy, but if just one person other than Martin Bryant had in their possession a firearm, there is an excellent chance that many lives would have been saved on that terrible day.

The member for Springwood is worried because our legislation might contravene the Australian Police Ministers Council meeting. So what? I do not know about the member for Springwood, but I do know that One Nation members are elected by the people of Queensland and that it is the people of Queensland whom we listen to and whom we serve to the best of our ability. We are not particularly interested in a bunch of Police Ministers who think that they can do what they want. The only reason that Queensland gets bludgeoned into submission by Canberra on every issue from National Competition Policy to national gun laws is that this House is full of spineless, fawning bootlickers who will not stand up to Canberra's tyranny.

The member for Springwood said that our legislation will give people an inalienable right to hold weapons. That is simply not correct. Our legislation provides for the issue of a lifetime weapons licence subject to the good behaviour of the licensee. This is patently obvious to anyone who has taken the time to read the document. And lifetime licences subject to good behaviour were also the policy of the previous Goss Labor Government. The member for Springwood has it wrong again, and he has proved to this House that either he is an imbecile or that he is determined to mislead the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Nelson-Carr): Order! That is very unparliamentary language. The member will please refrain from using such language.

Mr PAFF: Yes. I withdraw that.

We realise that this legislation contains a lifetime ban on conviction of an indictable offence on the possession of a firearm, but that demonstrates to the public that we are serious about ensuring that only fit and responsible people legally own firearms. If the member for Springwood is unhappy with that particular clause, then we would be happy to consider his amendments.

We are not trying to set up two committees, as the member for Springwood falsely suggests. We merely want to see the community liaison committee provided for in the original Weapons Act put into operation. Participation in the Community Liaison Committee would be entirely voluntary and will not cost the Government any money, but the member for Springwood continually gets it wrong because he is not interested in the facts, or he just cannot read.

I have three things to say regarding the terrible school shootings in the USA and the issue of minors having access to firearms. Firstly, we do not want children to have unsupervised access to firearms, and our policy recognises that. Secondly, we do not want our youths to be like the American youths who are responsible for school shootings. Unfortunately, that is what is happening, because the policies and the philosophies that Labor and the coalition push are forcing Australia's youth to become more and more American every day. It must be apparent to even the most fervent anti-firearm zealot in this House that for 150 or more years Queenslanders have owned firearms with very few problems until recently, when our society began to disintegrate, due to Americanisation, and that is the real problem. Those members of this House who do not want Australia to become like America had better stop aping the Americans.

The third thing that I want to say about children and firearms is that the national gun laws have created a new industry—the smuggling and trading of firearms—which can only increase. We know that a firearms black market is booming. We know that thanks to the integrity and courage of people such as Inspector John McCoomb, the former head of the Weapons Licensing Branch. We know that the Australian Customs Service has been gutted through cost cutting over the years. We know that almost anyone can get in a boat and sail to Australia undetected. So it is certain that many weapons are now pouring into the country to satisfy the newly created black market in firearms. What I am saying is that once this black market is firmly established, it will increase the ability of people, including young people, to acquire these weapons illegally and thus increase the likelihood of younger and younger people using firearms to commit crime.

The member for Toowoomba South put up an unconvincing argument as to why the National Party brought in the gun laws in 1996, which it now says it wants to change. He also presented the unconvincing argument that the National Party did everything it possibly could, short of breaking away from the Federation, to stick up for Queensland's firearm owners. The only trouble is that we do not believe him, and neither do the firearm owners of Queensland. If he is telling the truth, then why did the National Party not change the gun laws before the last election? If he is telling the truth, then why has the National Party not introduced its own private member's Bill to change the Weapons Act? I call on the member for Toowoomba South to table any evidence that he has to prove his claim. In the absence of any evidence, I am afraid I cannot believe him.

I also point out to the member for Toowoomba South that this legislation only allows the ownership of category D weapons for those people who qualify for a licence and, secondly, are members of a properly constituted military rifle association, as per the original Defence Act 1903. If that is the only issue that the National Party is concerned about, then we will be happy to consider any amendment that it proposes. But I do not think that it has any amendments, because its members are only pretenders.

Regarding the letter from Tim Fischer that the member for Toowoomba South incorporated into Hansard concerning the Crimtrac database, this was purely an exercise in damage control. In addition, I believe that it contains an erroneous statement. Mr Fischer said that the Crimtrac database will contain no record of a person's DNA profile recorded following a criminal conviction. But the Courier-Mail on 20 May said that DNA samples for the national database will be taken from people merely charged with an indictable offence. A crime is an indictable offence, according to the Criminal Code. I think the House would agree that there is a world of difference between the two statements and that Tim Fischer either misled the member for Toowoomba South or, more than likely, just does not know what he is talking about.

The misuse of statistics is legendary, and nowhere is this abuse more evident than in the area of firearms statistics. The publication entitled *Violent Deaths and Firearms in Australia: Data and Trends 1996* from the Australian Institute of Criminology is a good example. In the report is a table of homicides and suicides attributed to firearms by year from 1915 to 1995. While accurate in the sense of absolute numbers, when the population of Australia at the time is taken into account, the figures tell a far different story.

For example, in 1915, 26 homicides were attributed to firearms from a population of about five million. In 1996, 67 homicides were attributed to firearms from a population of about 18 million. In proportion to the population, the number of homicides has been roughly constant, but the number attributed to firearms has decreased. I cannot find any information about the number of suicides attributed to category C and D firearms. However, Australian Institute of Criminology publication No. 75, *Firearms Homicide in Australia 1997*, shows that about 27% of homicides were attributed to category C and D firearms. This equates to about 18 firearm-related homicides per year. Probably half these deaths were the result of criminal activity, because criminals will not hand in their guns. This leaves roughly nine other fatalities per year directly attributed to category C and D weapons.

If the object of the \$500m buyback was to save lives, then far more lives could have been saved with far less money. How many kidney machines, ambulances or even whole hospitals could have been built with the same money? According to this same Institute of Criminology report, about 23% of firearm-related homicides in Australia were committed by Asians, as against approximately 24% committed by Caucasians. If this is true, it is an extraordinary statistic, and it shows that we could save far more lives by directing more funding to fighting Asian organised crime rather than confiscating guns from good people.

If the object of the buyback was to save lives, why did they not spend the money on suicide prevention? Thousands of people kill themselves each year, whether they use a gun, rope, pills, exhaust fumes or just walk off a cliff. One of the best examples of bad information and bad statistics used by politicians and gun grabbers is the 1996 Kellerman and Reay study, on which the Leader of the Liberal Party relied to the detriment of his reputation. The Kellerman and Reay study said that guns were more likely to kill "people you know" rather than intruders. But what has emerged since then is that 85% of the mortalities used in the study were suicides, and another 8% of the mortalities should have been excluded due to unreliability. The remaining 7% of mortalities used in the Kellerman and Reay study also include criminals killed by other criminals, drug dealers, and also criminals on the run killed by police. The other major problem is that the study was conducted in one particular county and then extrapolated to cover the whole USA, and then further incorrectly extrapolated by the Leader of the Liberal Party to apply to Australia.

The Leader of the Liberal Party also referred to the October 1991 issue of the *Medical Journal of Australia*, in which an article examined firearm-related deaths in Queensland over a nine-year period. Although 76% of the fatalities were suicides, it is important to realise that suicide attributed to firearms has halved in Australia from the period 1915 to 1995 from about four per 100,000 people in 1915 to about two per 100,000 people in 1995. Furthermore, we know that suicide levels and civilian firearm ownership are not related. Overseas experience shows that some countries which have low or no civilian ownership of firearms have high suicide rates. According to the member's own figures, there were just 2.7 firearm-related deaths in Queensland per year over the life of the study that were either homicides or accidents.

How many more lives could have been saved by spending the Medicare increase on fixing our hospitals instead of confiscating guns from the good people? How many more lives could be saved if the police who are now shuffling paper in the Weapons Licensing Branch were out there arresting drug dealers? The truth is that the gun grab was never intended or designed to save lives but to score a quick political kill. The only problem is that it has not worked. It was the National Party that was massacred at the last State election.
