



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR ARCHERFIELD

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WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Archerfield—ALP) (9.37 p.m.): Today represents an historic day for Queenslanders who care about their safety and the safety of others. Today, or at the next parliamentary sitting, the Weapons Amendment Bill introduced by the One Nation Leader, Bill Feldman, will be defeated overwhelmingly. This will be a victory for humanity over irrationality.

The people who died tragically at Port Arthur three years ago and the victims of the Strathfield massacre have not died in vain. These horrific acts of violence brought our nation together. There has been resounding support for tight, uniform gun control in all States and Territories. This is not solely to reduce the occurrence of firearm-related homicides but to prevent the daily threats and injuries that hundreds of people endure at the end of a gun.

I accept that law-abiding gun owners have been required to make a sacrifice for the broader community benefit. I accept that many decent men and women who have used guns on their farms or in the course of their work felt as though they were being labelled criminals. This is not the intention of the tighter gun laws. We all have to make sacrifices of this kind. Strict limits are placed on our intake of alcohol when driving for the benefit of community safety. Speed limits are placed on our driving for the benefit of community safety. These are the same kinds of limits that we are talking about in relation to gun control—standard limits that apply to all of us. We may not like these limits but, as sensible citizens, we accept them as both necessary and reasonable. The same principle applies to gun control.

I vehemently reject the rationale put forward by One Nation that the defence of a person or the person's family in the person's place of residence will be a valid reason to obtain a firearm licence. This criterion would open the floodgates and allow any citizen to obtain a gun licence. It is also a flawed rationale. There is a legal requirement for ammunition to be stored separately from the gun. If a gun were to be ready for self-defence in a home invasion, it would need to be kept close at hand and kept loaded. This is extremely dangerous. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that possession of a firearm to protect the family home has the opposite effect, because it results in a staggering risk to family members. Eighty per cent of all firearm related deaths are among firearm owners and their families.

The argument that only fit and proper persons will own guns is also a nonsense. How can we realistically sort out the wheat from the chaff? On this point it is important to note that only around 4% of firearm related homicides appear to be associated with mental disorder, over one-third of firearm homicides occurred within the context of an intimate relationship, and around 80% of deaths by firearm in Australia are suicides. In most firearm incidents resulting in death, the offenders would generally fit the criterion of fit and proper people. Most would have committed no prior indictable offences nor have any diagnosed mental disorder. A prohibited persons register, as proposed by One Nation, would not be a useful safeguard. It identifies at-risk people after the horse has bolted—mostly after an offence has been committed.

It is widely accepted that restrictions on the access to and availability of firearms have been effective in reducing firearm related violence. We must continue to hold the line with tight gun controls. The introduction of uniform national gun laws in 1996 and the buyback scheme were bold and vital initiatives. The negotiations were tough. Threats were made to Prime Minister Howard and at a State level the member for Crows Nest endured many turbulent months of negotiating with key interest

groups. I commend the member for Crows Nest for holding firm on gun restrictions, in spite of his own personal views and the enormous pressure from shooters associations and his own rural constituencies.

I am encouraged, as I am sure the vast majority of Queenslanders are, by the rejection of the One Nation proposals by the Leader of the Opposition. This is sensible policy and sensible decision making. Moves to restrict gun ownership and use must rise above party politics.

I place on record and commend the tremendous courage and determination of the members of the Queensland Coalition for Gun Control and the National Coalition for Gun Control. The community members involved in these voluntary associations have fought hard to achieve sensible gun laws in Australia. They have endured threats and abuse in the push to make our community a safer place.

Several weeks ago, the National Coalition for Gun Control launched a national advertising campaign to ban semiautomatic hand guns in Australia. Radio and TV presenter Andrew Denton was the guest speaker at this launch in Sydney. This is the next great debate for us to have. Semiautomatic hand guns must be the next target for restriction. The situation in Australia now is that for a person to get a hand gun licence they merely need to be a member of a shooting club, have no prior convictions and no history of mental illness. With a category H licence people can get a semiautomatic hand gun, which can carry 15 or more rounds in the magazine. I remind members that Thomas Hamilton, who slaughtered children at the Dunblane primary school, used a semiautomatic hand gun and would qualify for one in Australia today.

It takes courage and determination to stand up to and reject the vile threats and pressure from a number of Far Right shooters groups. One Nation members of this Parliament are clearly lacking in courage. While they shrink and cower, my sense is that a lot of farmers and others are accepting of the gun laws.

I must admit that I am not sure what this "got to have my gun" culture is all about from those who want greater access to guns. It seems pretty blokey to me. In 94% of firearm incidents leading to homicide the offender is a male. It is clear that the misuse of firearms is a very male domain. It is my guess that the One Nation members and their gun-slinging supporters will not feel manly without a gun at their side. Wimps would want to loosen up the gun laws—not real men.
