



Speech by

**KEN TURNER**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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Hansard 9 June 1999

### **WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr TURNER** (Thuringowa—IND) (8.30 p.m.): Members of this House have stated that it is a great pleasure to rise to speak to the firearms issue. I find this difficult to understand. For me, I find the need to speak on this subject very sad. It is abhorrent that society has sunk to a level that we need to protect ourselves from ourselves. We talk of Martin Bryant as if he were some sort of phenomenon. However, the Martin Bryants have become commonplace in our world. Some of them hold very high office, and they carry out the same acts of human destruction on a larger scale because they have the power to order their fellow man to pull the trigger. Firearms, knives, clubs, machetes, explosives—it does not matter which weapon is used, it is the mentality of the person who uses the weapon that should be addressed.

Videos and movies, video games, the Internet, violence in the home, drugs and even modern music have all played a role in the twisting of some people's minds. They have replaced compassion and tolerance for our fellow man with intolerance, hate and violence. If those problems had been addressed as they arose, we would not be debating this matter now. I recognise that, because of Governments' indifference and failure to protect people from antisocial activities, we now need to have controls on tools that are capable of destruction.

Personally, I was raised with firearms. I am a member of the Townsville Pistol Club and patron of the Townsville Sporting Shooters Association. I really understand where sporting shooters are coming from. These people love their sport, they are responsible citizens who operate within responsible shooting clubs and they take a very responsible attitude to firearm use. Education classes for their members are an important part of shooters clubs. They certainly do not condone the actions of people who abuse the use of firearms. I recognise the need for gun control; however, it must be applied in a sensible manner that still allows the legitimate use of guns. I do not see allowing club shooters to own semiautomatic weapons as irresponsible if those weapons are registered under the same regulations as pistols, which have very strict guidelines. Every person contemplating buying a firearm should be put through an extensive background integrity check and a rigorous safety course before being allowed access to any firearm. In the interests of the safety of the community, I do not believe that semiautomatic weapons should be made available to the general public. To deny people on the land the right to own a semiautomatic weapon may impose some inconvenience; however, they are not denied the use of a bolt action rifle to perform their tasks. That is the price that we must pay for the increased violence in our society.

I have also listened to members speak about the recent massacre in the United States that resulted from the use of firearms. However, no mention was made of the fact that, had the explosives involved been detonated, through the destruction that those explosives would have caused the death toll from the shooting would have paled into insignificance. The children got the information to build these explosives——

**Ms Struthers:** How can that happen?

**Mr TURNER:** The death toll from the shooting would be minor compared to the 100-odd people——

**Ms Struthers** interjected.

**Mr TURNER:** I ask the member to listen closely. The children involved got the information to build these explosives, which are made so easily with step-by-step instructions from the Internet. What is our society becoming when we allow people access to this sort of information and then jump up and down when one of our citizens does what he or she has been taught to do? It could be said that we are as much to blame as the perpetrators. As a result of this massacre, President Clinton has now called for movie makers to consider the consequences of what they produce and the video game industry has agreed to plug a loophole that allows children to buy violent video games over the Internet. These moves could be too little too late. However, all of these problems in our society must be addressed as a matter of urgency before there is no turning back.

The Beattie Government voted against truth in sentencing. During the debate, Mr Foley stated—

"We stand for being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime."

Dr Clark also said that increasing the time a criminal spends in jail will not make a safer society and that we have to address the causes of crime. So I put it to the Beattie Government: the gun laws go only a small way towards making a safer society. We have to get tough on the causes of crime.

The statistics show that firearms were involved in only one fifth of the homicides in Australia. Therefore, 80% of homicides were caused by means other than firearms. We are more likely to be killed in the home by a family member or friend than in a public place by a stranger. On an international level, and this figure would come as no surprise to anyone, the United States homicide rate is four times Australia's homicide rate. What does that tell us? The US is definitely getting it wrong, but perhaps some countries are getting it right. What are they doing differently from us? Perhaps we need to look at that. Let us change every contributing factor that is destroying the basic fabric of society and bring sanity back to the people. Would we allow our children to drink poison knowing that it would make them very sick or kill them? No, of course we would not! Yet we allow their minds to be poisoned by all the elements that I have spoken about, and we do nothing about it. Let us get tough on the real issues.

It has been expressed to me by returned servicemen who were involved in close combat that after a while it grows on you. Every day death, mutilation and rotting corpses becomes more acceptable and eventually one does not even notice. People in the comfort of their own homes are bombarded by videos showing continuous violence to the stage at which they become as desensitised as the soldiers in a real war and the vulnerable act out the scenarios they are witnessing. My two year old granddaughter watches the Wiggles. She can sing all the words to their songs, she knows all the characters and she acts out the parts. Even at that tender age, children also watch videos, many of which are violent, with their parents. They are being trained virtually from birth to accept this violence as normal. Let us be honest with ourselves. How many members in this House would have unthinkingly allowed their young children or grandchildren to watch brutal violence in their own homes?

A ridiculous comment that is often quoted by the civil rights campaigners is, "If you do not want to watch it, turn it off." I do turn it off and many other people turn it off. However, we are not the ones to worry about; it is the people who want to watch these programs, who enjoy these programs and become affected by these programs who are at risk of becoming offenders.

Unlike most other countries, Australia is fortunate in that it shares no borders with other countries. Although we live on an island, we still adopt the policies and bad habits of other countries and societies. We have a unique opportunity to reject a lot of outside influences. If we strengthen our own ethics and moral values, we could be selective in what we adopt from other societies. I emphasise that if the Government is strong enough and prepared to attack these issues, it may not be too late. Every day of every year that passes we sink further into the abyss. It worries me that I will leave my children and grandchildren in a society that is out of control.

In the interests of legitimate firearm use, I see no harm in reviewing the Weapons Act. However, I cannot support this Bill introduced by the honourable member for Caboolture without suitable amendments. As members of Parliament, I believe that we should maintain an open mind on all issues, including firearms. However, I emphasise that the use of firearms to destroy each other is only one element in the breakdown of our society.

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