



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

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WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (9.34 p.m.): On the third anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre we were confronted by an extreme Right Wing political attempt to relax our gun laws by allowing dangerous weapons back into the community. Only weeks after America's latest atrocity where 13 people were killed in a society that supports a gun-crazed perspective, we are confronted by the same extreme Right Wing One Nation—and its defectors—attempt to bring guns back into the community. This is shameful.

As a mother of five children and a teacher of many young people, I feel outraged not only because we are constantly reminded of these shocking and horrific events in our history where innocent people continue to lose their lives but also because most of these incidents occur in settings where we least expect them—schools, shopping centres, restaurants and our homes.

After the Port Arthur tragedy, the Government, responsible individuals and agencies moved jointly towards the development of uniform firearm legislation. Since homicide has the highest potential to cause fear in the general population, and in every five days one person is killed by another with the use of a firearm, it is not hard to understand why so many of us are outraged by the attempts of a minority of people to reintroduce guns into the community. Gun massacres are not new to Australia.

Mr Knuth: Do you reckon we should get rid of them? Would that solve the problem?

Ms NELSON-CARR: The honourable member should listen; maybe he will learn something.

During the period between 1987 and mid-1996 the Australian Institute of Criminology reports that, on average, 13 people have died in multiple killings by firearms every year—an average of 5.3 deaths per incident. The Port Arthur tragedy and another mass killing in Brisbane in 1996 added another 42 people to the death statistics.

With these statistics in mind it is no wonder that those responsible members of our community who campaigned for tighter gun control were those who wanted to save lives. The grief and pain which follow gun deaths are spared as a result of gun control. Prior to the tightening of firearm regulations, domestic homicides across Australia were increasing. In so many cases, husbands and fathers would use a rifle to kill the wife and children and then commit suicide. The reasons for such massacres ranged from jealousy to business failure. Frequently, friends and neighbours had no idea that the family was in turmoil.

While the gun lobbyists call for increased mental health services to curb domestic homicide, the member for Caboolture was saying on radio that gun outlaws, or gun users, are a small minority of people whose mental problems should be appropriately dealt with within the health care system and that law-abiding shooters should be left alone to pursue their favourite pastime. The member wants us to believe that criminals and psychiatrically disturbed people are the real causes of the gun problem. Of the 28 massacres between 1987 and 1996, only two of the killers had a criminal record, and only three had recognised psychiatric problems. Most of them fell into the "normal" category.

Indeed, many would suggest that the type of murderous behaviour seen in many of these massacres is becoming commonplace. It is usually angry, inadequate and unhappy men who are perpetrating this behaviour. This type of person is more often seen in our community. It is a quick, easy way to relieve negativity and frustration.

This would support the notion that it is undesirable to support a gun culture. Guns should not be established as a vital element in work and play—that is, a gun to be admired for recreation and providing a full and happy life. Guns should not be promoted, as in the American culture, as the pathway to freedom and independence and as a part of everyday life. The more that guns are taken for granted, the more violence will be normalised and the more frequent will be its appearance.

To quote Linden Richard in *Biting the Bullet: Gun Control in Australia*—

"An important feature of the most recent national uniform gun control legislation was the requirement that ownership of weapons be recorded. The gun lobby dismissed the requirement as expensive, a waste of time and a useless aid to catching criminals. In light of the tragedies, however, the reason for such registration becomes clearer. In many cases an offender's lack of knowledge of a weapon has cost people their lives. For example:

In 1992 in Terrigal, New South Wales, a man who had already surrendered several weapons to police used an illegally retained gun to shoot dead two women and three men in a domestic dispute.

In 1995 two police officers who were coming to the aid of a woman in an apparently routine domestic dispute in Crescent Head, New South Wales, were shot dead by the woman's drunken ex-boyfriend. The man used a weapon police had not known he possessed.

A proper firearms registry would have given the police some indication of what dangers they were likely to face in these instances. It would also give them this type of invaluable knowledge during any future events.

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The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) has suggested that some mentally unstable people are attracted to guns. After the murder of three people in a gun shop in the Melbourne suburb of Springvale in 1993, the SSAA called for gun shop owners to be armed (*Australia, Gun Massacres in Australia*, p. 46). But would this be a positive solution, or would it just lead to more deaths? Proponents of tighter firearm restrictions believe a better solution would be to remove the guns from ready access and only place them in an atmosphere of restrained and responsible use."

The problem of suicide in our society is only exacerbated by the availability of firearms. The gun provides a fast and effective means to an end so that by reducing the accessibility of such provision we would probably reduce the number of such deaths.

The Herald Sun of 27 November 1984 reported as follows—

"The April 1994 suicide of rock singer Kurt Cobain (of the American band Nirvana) shocked his fans, and led to intense curiosity and interest among many teenagers who had never previously heard of him. A few months later, a young brother and sister, aged 12 and 15 years, from country Victoria killed themselves the day before they had to attend a fringe Christian group's four-day country convention. The suicide note said the convention was the reason for their action. Their suicide note said the convention was a reason for their action. It was reported that the girl was a Nirvana fan. The children used their father's rifle which they had never been taught how to use. It was kept under a bed. The children's bewildered parents said there was no warning of the suicides. The father said, 'I can't understand why they would do this. Suicide is so final.'"

Jenny Plumstead, of Gun Control Australia, said that the tragedy highlighted the weakness in Australia's gun laws at that time, and stated further—

"Sensible gun laws could have prevented these unfortunate deaths. A 1993 survey by the Bureau of Statistics found that 85,000 homes in Melbourne had guns, but fewer than 20,000 of them kept their guns locked safely in a steel box or safe. Most simply stored them in a cupboard."

Mr Feldman interjected.

Ms NELSON-CARR: The member was talking, so he did not hear the reasons.

The issue at stake is public safety. Although those proponents of less restrictive firearm conditions deny that the restriction of gun flow in the general population will not reduce firearm misuse, it has to be agreed that our society is tragically touched by gun mayhem. If our shocking suicide rate, especially among rural males, can possibly be reduced by lessening the availability of guns, then surely this should be reason enough to continue to tighten gun control measures. How else can we live in a peaceful society if we do not place limits on gun usage?

Mr Feldman: Help them keep their farms and you wouldn't have poverty.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Is the member finished? Gun control is not oppressive; rather, it helps to set boundaries of civilised behaviour that can only benefit the whole. If we refused to pay taxes and drove on the wrong side of the road, there would be no benefits for anyone. Our environment would be unsafe. I recommend the tightest possible controls on gun ownership and usage in our society and urge members not to support the Bill.
