



Speech by

Dr PETER PRENZLER

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

Hansard 25 May 1999

WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Dr PRENZLER (Lockyer—ONP) (9 p.m.): Tonight, I will take this opportunity to debunk some of the nonsense and hysterical contributions that some members have made during this debate. Firstly, the Police Minister's misleading and baseless statements indicate an appalling lack of understanding of his portfolio. He says that this Bill will allow the unrestrained ownership of and trade in semiautomatic weapons. I say here and now that this Bill will not—and I repeat, will not—allow the unrestrained ownership of and trade in semiautomatic weapons or, for that matter, any other weapons. On the contrary, only persons who do not have a criminal record and who complete the required theoretical and practical training and then obtain a weapons licence will be able to legally obtain a category A, B, or C weapon.

Those who wish to obtain a category D weapon, in addition to satisfying the above requirements, will have to demonstrate a legitimate reason for having such a weapon, such as an occupational need or being a member of an appropriate organisation. In the case of a category D military firearm, a person will have to be a member of a properly constituted military rifle association, such as the Queensland Military Rifle Club Incorporated. These requirements are the same as those that are presently required for category H weapons. The current regulations are perfectly satisfactory.

I remind the House that military rifle clubs were formed under the auspices of the Defence Act 1903. They were formed to provide a pool of semi-trained civilians who would be able to contribute to the country's defence in the event of war. Our reliance upon high-technology weaponry at the expense of manpower may also prove to be a fatal error in a future war. One only has to look at the war in the Balkans to realise that technology can never replace ground forces. In this age of cost cutting, our defence forces have been cut to the bone and the need for training facilities such as the Queensland Military Rifle Club is greater now than ever before. That is why we believe that members of these organisations should have access to category D military weapons, provided they satisfy all the conditions.

We are as safety conscious as anyone else, and we strongly believe that only suitably qualified, fit and proper persons should be able to legally own firearms with a minimum of Government interference. That is why we support the establishment of a prohibited person's register. The Minister says that our Bill will make it easier for criminals to obtain firearms. As the crime statistics prove, criminals in this country have never had any problem in obtaining any weapons that they require. Despite the destruction of some 600,000 weapons during the gun grab in the firearm amnesty, crime involving firearms is accelerating.

Mr Knuth: Not according to the Labor Party.

Dr PRENZLER: We realise that. They have statistics different from ours.

Mr Barton: They're only official statistics.

Dr PRENZLER: How does the Police Minister explain that? I will give members a clue. The Government took the guns off the farmers and the pensioners and all the other good people, but it did not take them from those with criminal intentions. Regarding the proposed prohibited person's register, the Minister is worried about the administrative requirements. We say that if he stopped monitoring the hundreds of thousands of good Queensland firearm owners—and there are lots of them; most people

who own firearms are good, decent citizens and the Minister well and truly knows that—and instead concentrated on monitoring the unsuitable people who apply for a licence, we could prevent many unsuitable persons from legally acquiring firearms and still save police resources. The concept of a prohibited person's register is not new. In fact, the Explosives Act 1999 establishes such a list.

In terms of the community liaison panel, we are well aware that the current Act provides for such a provision. The reason that we have included the community liaison committee in the Bill is that we want to see it put into operation. The National Party never did anything about it when it was in Government and I have no doubt that this Labor Government would not do anything about it unless we prompted them.

Regarding our proposal to change the storage requirements for firearms under certain circumstances, I wish to put the Minister at ease. The current restrictive requirements are ridiculous. Farmers need to be able to drive around their paddocks without the necessity to repeatedly stow and retrieve their firearms. I can assure many members opposite that if they are out in the bush and have to shoot a dingo or something very, very quickly, after taking their firearm out of a locked safe, putting the bolt back in and finding their locked-up ammunition, that dingo is half a kilometre away.

Mr Knuth: They wouldn't know that, because they don't come from the land.

Dr PRENZLER: That is what I am trying to tell them. We know that. If the Minister thinks that we are barking up the wrong tree, then I suggest that he goes out to the bush and has a talk to some of those farmers.

I turn now to the contributions of the leader of the Liberal faction of the National Party. He said that the National Party cannot support this Bill. I believe that he does not believe that self-defence is a valid reason for owning a firearm. I am very pleased that the member for Surfers Paradise has said what he really thinks about self-defence, and we will be doing our best to distribute his comments throughout country Queensland so that people can make an informed choice at the next election.

For the edification of the House, let me state once more that a person can obtain a firearm for self-defence or for any other reason if and only if they have a clean criminal record. They have to complete the required practical and theoretical training courses and they can then obtain a licence. I would like to point out to the House that it is no good having the right of self-defence under the Criminal Code if people do not have the means to defend themselves. How is an older person supposed to protect himself against one or more drug-crazed home invader if he has no access to such a weapon?

In the Courier-Mail of Tuesday, 11 May, we learned that in the past few weeks more than 30 elderly people in south-east Queensland have been assaulted. The Tasmanian RSL wants people to be able to obtain a firearm for self-defence. I fully support that stance. In my opinion, if somebody invades a person's home, that person is invading someone's personal property, putting that person's life, property and family in danger. Such a person has no right to be there and has no right to any protection under the law.

The leader of the Liberal faction of the National Party boasts that if it were not for him, Canberra would have imposed absolute national control on the issue. Honourable members know that the Federal Government had no constitutional power at all to impose any firearm laws in Queensland. The Prime Minister himself even said so. The only reason we have these stupid gun laws now is that the Leader of the Opposition, when he was the Premier, ceded Queensland's jurisdiction to Canberra. If the Leader of the Opposition fought so hard for Queensland, then he should prove it. I call on him to table any evidence that he has to back his claims. The Leader of the Opposition also complains that the Democrats now have the balance of power in the Senate. I put to him that if it was not for the National Party who gave their preferences to the Democrats instead of One Nation, the balance of power in the Senate would be quite different.

The Leader of the Opposition also said that the National Party will fix things when it gets back into Government. That is not good enough. The temporary Leader of the Opposition says, "Just vote for us one more time and I promise we will fix the problem we created when we were in Government." They have promised a new set of gun laws and a new policy on gun laws at the next election. If they are saying that the current law is no good and that they want to fix it when they get into Government, why on earth did they introduce the stupid law in the first place? It is no good waiting for the next election, because probably there will never be another National Party Government in Queensland if they do not start sharing their preferences with One Nation. If the coalition or any other member wishes to amend our Bill, we call on them to do it now or forever hold their peace. It must not be used as a political war ground.

I turn to the lacklustre contribution of the Attorney-General, who is a bit of a bore and a windbag at the best of times. Firstly, let me state that it was the Government that cynically organised the debate of the legislation to fall on the third anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre. They should be ashamed of themselves. As members would realise, the Bill was introduced into the Parliament on 11 November last year. The Attorney-General's cynical aspersion that the introduction of this Bill was deliberately

timed to coincide with the end of World War I is totally unfounded. No symbolism was intended by our party. In any event, I make no apology for the introduction of a Bill to enable the protection of one's family. That was just one of the freedoms for which those brave men fought and died. The Attorney-General stands doubly condemned for attempting to score political points and for belittling the sacrifices made by our diggers. The Attorney-General said that Governments throughout this nation took a stand against the culture of violence, but have they really done anything except disarm good, honest Queenslanders?

The Attorney-General knows full well that despite the gun grab, there is now more violence, drug addiction and armed robbery in Queensland than ever before.

Mr Knuth: Not according to the Labor Party.

Dr PRENZLER: Yes. Those are the figures. On 11 May in Brisbane, a man in his 50s was bashed in his home, and on the Gold Coast, a 55 year old woman was handcuffed in her home by two armed bandits. On the same day, a Gold Coast fruiterer was robbed at gunpoint. Police said that that was the fourth robbery of the week and they warned late-night traders to be on guard against bandits. However, what are they supposed to use to protect themselves? Harsh language?

The Attorney-General said that the defence of one's self or family is not a genuine reason to acquire and own a weapon, and for once is in complete agreement with the National Party. What does he say to the 30 or so elderly Queenslanders who have been bashed and brutalised in the past month or so? How does he explain to those older citizens that they cannot keep a weapon to defend themselves so that they are helpless? We believe that, provided a person meets our stringent requirements and obtains a licence, self-defence is a completely valid reason to acquire and use a firearm. Indeed, it is a human right that no Government should be able to remove. What is the use of the self-defence clause in the Criminal Code if people do not have the means to defend themselves?

I also take offence at the Attorney-General's disparaging attitude towards One Nation and, by extension, the half a million Queenslanders who have had a gutful of Labor and the coalition parties. For the edification of the Attorney-General, I point out that so far One Nation has introduced nine pieces of legislation into the 49th Parliament of Queensland. They span a wide and diverse range of issues, from truth in political advertising to improving defamation laws and improving security of payment for subcontractors. We have introduced those sensible pieces of legislation to fix outstanding problems that the Labor Party and the coalition parties cannot or will not fix, and we will continue to do so.

It is a bit rich for the Attorney-General to say that he is tough on crime and the causes of crime. The other day on the radio we all heard the Attorney-General spluttering about the release of armed service station robbers, who returned to the very service station that they had robbed and taunted their victim. Where are the Attorney-General's tough sentencing provisions for armed criminals? Unfortunately, they are down the drain with that victim's tears. The Attorney-General's conduct was pathetic and an embarrassment. He should hang his head in shame and he should resign. This is one of the few times that I have agreed with the temporary Leader of the Opposition.

In general, no-one can deny that Queenslanders have had a long and successful relationship with firearms and that the violent crimes that we are witnessing today are recent aberrations. For a long time, Queenslanders have owned more firearms per capita than the residents of any other State in Australia, yet we have the lowest incidence of firearm-related crime. This crime has nothing to do with the civilian ownership of firearms. It is certainly caused by the fragmentation of our society in general. We now live in an era that is arguably devoid of morals, obligations and responsibilities to the community and to ourselves. This Government is doing nothing to rectify the moral vacuum. Indeed, it is exacerbating the situation by encouraging prostitution and pushing homosexuality in our schools and soon will be confiscating our land to give to the multinational corporations.

I draw the Attorney's attention to an article by Chris Griffith that appeared in the Sunday Mail of 2 May 1999. In that article, Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman, a retired US military professor and behavioural expert, said that there was ample evidence to link violent video games and violence. By what authority does he make such a statement? He has trained US military troops on video games to improve their accuracy and to desensitise the soldiers to killing people. They use variations of commonly available games such as Doom—games that are available to our children.

Recently in the Courier-Mail, Dr Jill Brannock of the Queensland University of Technology said that young Australians were learning problem solving and aggression from violent video games. The president of the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Association, Sarah Nelson, said that the negative impact that violent media had on children could not be denied forever. Is it any wonder that we have the problems that we do?

I realise that the problem is complex and goes beyond violence in the media, but something has to be done to reinforce correct forms of behaviour in our young people. The firearm owners of

Queensland have paid an unjust price and now it is time for the root causes of our defective and dysfunctional society to be addressed.

Those members who are so blind that they cannot see, as the Attorney-General puts it, should reflect on the massacre in Rwanda where rampaging Hutus slaughtered one million Tutsis with nothing more than blades, sticks, clubs and stones.

Mr Knuth: Didn't they have any guns?

Dr PRENZLER: No, not one. There were guns there, but they did not use them. No firearms were used in the attack in Rwanda, but that did not stop the horrible slaughter. How many Tutsi lives would have been saved if a few of them had firearms with which to defend themselves? More recently in Indonesia we saw images of warriors displaying the decapitated heads of their enemies, whom they killed using primitive and improvised weapons, not firearms. These are examples of atrocities perpetrated with a complete absence of firearms. How many lives would have been saved if the villagers had access to firearms to protect themselves? Recent events in Rwanda and Indonesia show that responsible firearm ownership and violence is not related.

In conclusion, the collective safety of society is not jeopardised by the private ownership of weapons by responsible persons; rather, it is enhanced. The right to defend oneself and one's family is an immutable right—and a human right—and, although tolerated in the Criminal Code, is a meaningless right without the means or the tools with which to defend oneself. As time goes by and as violent attacks continue, people will continue to exercise their right to self-defence by the means at their disposal, regardless of whether or not the Government approves. It does not take too much thought to realise that a criminal, if he knows that the owner is armed, will think long and hard before breaking into a dwelling and risk being shot by the owner. Therein lies part of the solution to our increasing burglary and home invasion problems.

The national gun grab was poorly planned, poorly executed and has failed to stop crime or improve public safety. In addition, the Government has trampled on the rights of good Queensland firearm owners, who are being demonised and persecuted by the politically correct but particularly stupid Labor and coalition parties. One Nation has proved its courage and determination to stick up for Queensland firearm owners——

Time expired.
