



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 9 June 1999

WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (8.40 p.m.): I apologise to the member for Nicklin. I do not have a list, and I was last on the list previously.

Any member of this House who refers to the Port Arthur massacre as a reason for banning firearms should take a long hard look at themselves. When this House has debated issues relating to Anzac Day and a few other things, straight away members of the ALP screamed, "Hypocrisy" and cried, "How dare you question our loyalty?" I say to them: how dare they use the deaths of 35 innocent people as a crutch for their lame arguments. The simple fact is that the gun never killed anyone. The person who operated that piece of machinery killed people and any argument to the contrary is insane.

Ms Nelson-Carr interjected.

Mr NELSON: I was brought up with firearms. My father carried a pistol on his hip for 18 years. I have never killed anyone and I do not have any intention of doing so. To say that every firearm owner in Australia will kill somebody is absolute lunacy. That is the reason why we are here tonight. Members opposite talk about sticking up for the people in their electorates. I was elected mainly on a platform of sticking up for the firearm owners in my electorate. I come from a rural area where there is a high proportion of firearm ownership. The reality is the most murders committed with firearms are committed in cities, which supposedly have a relatively low proportion of firearm ownership. If it was not against the law, I could have brought a crate containing a Bren gun and a box of pistols into this House, because those weapons are readily available. Any argument to the contrary is insane.

The firearms that have been banned and confiscated will not be used to commit murders and violent crime. Those firearms were handed in by law-abiding citizens who obey the laws of this State, even though it is to their detriment. They do so because they believe that the laws of the State should be abided by. When the Government disarmed the people of this country, it did not disarm criminals or people who were going to commit the violent crimes that it is so worried about. It disarmed the people on the land, the sporting shooters, farmers and other people who owned firearms for legitimate reasons. The firearms that are being used to commit murders and acts like the Port Arthur massacre are still on the streets and they will still be there in 20 years' time. The Government will not get rid of them, and it knows that. There is no denying that at all.

The Government cannot get rid of illegal firearms. They are in this country like illegal drugs are. It is illegal to smoke marijuana, but I know plenty of people who do.

Ms Nelson-Carr interjected.

Mr NELSON: I do not mix with them and the member for Mundingburra shows her ignorance on this subject when she speaks like that. The simple fact is that illegal firearms are out there—not head lice, but illegal firearms.

We should be about fighting crime. Fighting crime does not mean that we institute laws that take away a person's right to own a firearm. Fighting crime means that we do things like introducing truth in sentencing.

Mr Knuth interjected.

Mr NELSON: Exactly. Fighting crime means doing things like deterring criminals from committing violent crime and stopping them from purchasing the weapons with which they commit those violent crimes. I put it to the House that when the police station in Lakemba in New South Wales was shot up, it was not shot up with a registered firearm. I put it to the House that in Australia most of the murders that are committed with firearms are not committed by people who are registered or who have firearm licences. They are usually committed by people who have brought guns off the street from black market dealers, and I can tell the House that those types of weapons are available in large numbers.

The simple fact is that currently there are debates about decriminalising things like heroin and marijuana, because we have had a long prohibition on those things. The Government has put in a place a prohibition on firearms. Will I be in this Chamber in 40 years' time when I am in my 65th year and, after I have participated in a condolence motion for some members opposite, will I have to stand and say, "It is time that we decriminalised the ownership of firearms."

Mr Wells: Are you after National Party preselection?

Mr NELSON: I put it on the record yet again for the Minister for Education that I am not after National Party preselection and I do not want it. I would not be elected if I ran for the National Party in my electorate.

We now have a prohibition on firearms, just as we have a prohibition on drug use. Some circles are arguing for the removal of that prohibition on drug use—to free it up a little. I do not agree with that personally. I believe that drug use should remain a criminal offence. However, in a few years' time will we have the same debate to decriminalise firearm ownership? Maybe history will be the best judge of that.

I put on the record that I do not have a firearm licence and I do not own a gun. When I was in the Army I was quite happy to hand my firearm in at the end of an exercise because I hated the thing. It was a tool that I used as a soldier in order to carry out my duty. I did not want to take it home and I did not want to go shooting with it. I do not derive any great pleasure from shooting feral animals. That is not something that I find enjoyable or fun to do. It is a job that has to be done on farms if, for example, wild pigs are ripping up the crops or feral cats, dogs or dingos are killing animals. That is not a job that I relish. Killing anything is not trendy, lovely or a good and fine thing to do. However, in some cases it is simply necessary to destroy animals.

A debate about trapping feral pigs is currently raging. I can tell the wonderful bureaucrats who came up with that idea that feral pigs cannot be trapped. One or two may be trapped, but pigs wise up after a while and will no longer go near the traps. The only way to properly eradicate feral pigs from a property is to shoot them. As any honourable member who has done a bit of pig shooting will confirm, it is damn hard to drop some of those boars. I am a crack shot, and again the challenge is there if anyone wants to step up. I can tell honourable members that it is damn hard to drop a feral pig with a high-powered rifle, let alone with a tiny bolt action .22 or something like that. I certainly would not wrestle an 80 kilo boar with a knife and a pack of dogs, because sometimes the hunter can come off second best. The point remains that in order to be humane, sometimes the best thing to do is to use a high-powered weapon and, hopefully, drop the animal with one shot. Causing distress to any animal, whether it is feral or not, is not something that I am about. Most farmers do not like to see any animal suffer because, believe it or not, farmers who work with animals are usually the most caring people on earth because they care about their——

Mr Knuth interjected.

Mr NELSON: A few of them would, but I digress. Some people who oppose firearm ownership argue that we are trying to follow the American style of the right to bear arms. That is an interesting statement. Time and time again when Governments have become oppressive people have had to stand up to them. Fortunately in this country people have never had to take it upon themselves to stand up to a Government. As I say, that is fortunate. It is a great thing that Federation in this country was created by a vote and it is a great thing that we can come into this House and debate issues. Even though I vehemently disagree with some members in this House, it is a place of debate and we can discuss issues here.

In some cases when legislation is passed, there is an angry reaction to it. The member for Archerfield went on about manhood, which is something that she knows very little about because she is a woman. I do not try to speak about being a woman because I am not one and I have no idea about the subject. I am a male and I can tell the House that holding a firearm does not make me feel any more of a man. It is a tool like a shovel or an axe. Members can believe it or not, but I do not understand why people use firearms for sport because I think it would be incredibly boring to shoot targets all day. However, that is my opinion. I used to hate lying on a 300-metre mound and having to group my rifle every couple of days. It used to be the most boring thing on earth. Some people in the community have the fundamental belief——

Mr Fenlon interjected.

Mr NELSON: I accept the jealousy from members opposite. To date, my achievements have made me a member of this House at a much younger age than them. I am doing the job that the people of Tablelands sent me here to do. Those people have asked me to come in here and speak about firearms. I am doing my job, just as the member for Townsville and the member for Mundingburra did when they said that they were standing up for their electorates, and just as the member for Bundaberg quite often does when she says she is standing up for her electorate. As all members should well and truly know, this is an issue in my electorate and it got me elected to this House. I am trying genuinely to put my point of view forward.

The funny thing about all this is that I expect this reaction from the ALP. They are sticking to their guns and their principles, and that is fine. I understand that. That is their platform and that is fine. The people who have some explaining to do—and I think they realise it—are the members on this side of the House. Again, that is why I am here and the former member for Tablelands is not.

Mr Veivers interjected.

Mr NELSON: Mick Veivers is still here. I think he will be here a lot longer than most.

As I said, given the speech from the Leader of the National Party, I think they realise that mistakes were made. I wait with bated breath and in great anticipation for the amendments to the Weapons Act that the National Party will bring in before the next election. I hope those address some of the fundamental errors made in the first one.

An honourable member: Just before the election.

Mr NELSON: Just before the election.

I wish to raise an issue that came to our attention very recently, namely, the 40-hour TAFE course for people who own firearms. I know many people in my electorate who are members of associations and who are registered and licensed firearms owners who will attend that course because, again, they will have to do so to keep their legitimate firearms. But I can tell honourable members that a few people—probably not from my electorate—will not attend those wonderful 40-hour TAFE courses, similar to those that teach people how to use a chainsaw. I will tell honourable members who will not be attending the 40-hour TAFE course. It will be the criminal element in society who have illegal firearms and who commit crimes that horrify members on both sides of the House. The 40-hour TAFE course will take away money and time from legitimate owners of firearms who have gone out of their way to comply with the Government's laws. The bureaucrats can shake their heads all they like. In reality, the criminals—for example, the people who shoot up police stations and commit other crimes—will not attend a 40-hour TAFE course that teaches them firearms safety and how to shoot at a target. When they pull their shotgun out of the boot to pull a bank robbery, they are not really interested in where the safety catch is. The simple fact is that these 40-hour TAFE courses address nothing, waste the public money and waste the time of legitimate firearms users who have done nothing wrong but who, yet again, are being punished for the crimes of others.

This all gets back to a fundamental belief in people's rights. I believe that, if an individual commits a crime, that person should be punished for that crime. I believe that if someone does something wrong to others, as an individual that person should say sorry. If we do something wrong, we should apologise. I believe people should be targeted for their actions as individuals. When we start punishing groups in society for the wrongdoing of others, we open the door.

I will give the House a simple example. Anybody who has armed service experience would know that, if one person in a unit stuffs up, everyone is punished. That is all well and good in a tight-knit military environment. However, when that approach is imposed on the wider community all it does is cause resentment, anger and frustration. People say, "I did nothing wrong. Why am I being targeted? Why are these regressive laws being imposed on me, my friends and the people who participate in this sport with me? Why am I being targeted and punished when I have done nothing wrong?" Therefore, we are breeding resentment.

No criminal will attend this 40-hour TAFE course, that is, unless somebody has a wonderful plan to offer the course in prisons so as to give prisoners who have used firearms more training in their use so that they do not accidentally shoot their mate when they are jumping out of the car to do a bank robbery. Criminals will not attend this course. Again, this is a waste of taxpayers' dollars based on a fanatical belief that taking firearms off registered owners will reduce crime.

Numerous facts and figures have been cited in the Chamber to prove conclusively that taking away people's guns does not reduce criminal activity. It does not, cannot and will not do so. Any argument to the contrary is ludicrous to say the least. But again, I am not here to judge this; I am just passing on a message. The judges are the 25% of people who voted against the major parties at the last election and the 800,000 or 900,000 people who voted against those parties at the Federal election.

As a society, we should not punish law-abiding citizens and let criminals go free or get away with very minimal punishment. Today we heard that an offender walked free after serving only 25 years for destroying a life. Again, he did not use a firearm, he used a knife. At the moment, there are moves afoot to ban knives or other types of weapons that can be used to stab people. I remember hearing, "That will never happen. We'll never ban knives. You can't ban knives." To believe the contrary is to overdose on political correctness. It is simply not true. I reiterate that I am not a firearms owner. I do not have a firearm. I do not need one; I live in town. However, the simple fact is that many law-abiding citizens need a firearm to pursue either a legitimate sport—a sport that Australia wins gold medals in—or to destroy feral animals on properties or for the many other reasons for which firearms are necessary. That brings me to the Bill under discussion.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr NELSON: It certainly does not bring me to the end; I have four minutes to go.

There are certain parts of the Bill with which I cannot agree. When I was a member of the One Nation Party I did not agree with them and I sought to have some of them changed. They were not changed. That is an internal issue more than anything else, and that has been resolved by the fact that I am no longer with One Nation.

Mr Fenlon: They miss you, too.

Mr NELSON: I am sure they do.

I was elected on a platform of arguing against a restrictive firearms policy. Hopefully, as I said before, one day we will be back in the Parliament debating the issue of whether we should lift a restrictive prohibition that we have had for many years.

In conclusion, many references have been made to the United States. For example, under Virginia's Project Exile every criminal who is captured in possession of a firearm or who uses a firearm to commit a criminal act is automatically given a further five years' on top of whatever sentence they get. Project Exile has reduced criminality dramatically across-the-board. The National Rifle Association of America has stated that, if that law was applied right across the United States—again, it is very supportive of this law—that would be the ultimate form of targeting the criminal instead of targeting innocent people who have done nothing wrong and who have been legitimate firearm owners for some time.

My main message tonight is that if the Government were to target criminal behaviour and the illegal ownership of firearms, strike down people who import firearms into this country, knock gang related violence on the head, target heavy drug importation and attack the fundamentals of crime, such as that which the member for Thuringowa spoke about, it would have my full and undying support. However, when it attacks the legitimate freedoms and rights of individuals and when it attacks peace-loving and innocent law-abiding citizens of this State, it does nothing to reduce crime and everything to increase the chances of people like me and other honourable members being re-elected.
