



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 15 November 2000

WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (9.06 p.m.): As the member for Thuringowa stated when introducing this Bill to Parliament, its intention is to bring some sense into today's world of burgeoning bureaucracy. One has to ask: when will Government begin to trust those who do comply with the laws and regulations of a State and its country? The current licensing presents individuals with a ludicrous situation whereby months of legal registration in another State will become invalid if a person decides to travel for any extended period. Many people who fall into this category are in the armed services who move from State to State following their occupation, and many of these armed service personnel are members of gun clubs. Many those affected are also retirees or pensioners who often have plenty of time to fill and choose to travel and explore this wonderful State and this wonderful country whilst still pursuing that hobby.

There is currently temporary recognition of interstate licenceholders who participate in a shooting competition conducted by an approved shooting club or approved by the Commissioner of Police, licenceholders who undertake recreational shooting on rural land with permission given before the event to shoot on the land by the land-holder or a licenceholder who visits Queensland to perform an occupational requirement to shoot on rural land for rural purposes are taken to be licensed in Queensland for the purpose of those activities. There is also the opportunity to obtain a visitors' licence, which may be issued to an adult who resides outside Queensland, interstate or overseas, and intends visiting Queensland to engage in an activity that is one of the reasons for possession of a weapon under section 11 of the Weapons Act 1990, which includes the sport of target shooting, recreational shooting, an occupational requirement, a collection by a collector of weapons, military re-enactment or a historical demonstration, starting sporting events or theatrical production.

A visitors' licence may be issued to an adult if the person is entitled by law to possess and use a firearm in the State or country where the person usually resides. The maximum term of a visitors' licence is only three months. For many, this is only the start of what they hope will be a long and relaxing holiday, but they will be confronted with the necessity to hunt for a venue where they can renew their licence. In the event that interstate residents decide to move to Queensland and become permanent residents, the interstate licence is taken to be the corresponding licence under Queensland law for three months from the date of notification in the case of category A and B weapons or seven days from the date of notification in the case of category C, D and H weapons or until the applicant's licence is approved or rejected, whichever comes first.

This need to register in Queensland is not only an added expense to those who have no desire to contravene the law but also a frustrating paper trail. The member for Thuringowa stated that Inspector McCoomb, the former head of the Queensland Weapons Licensing Branch, has stated publicly that only 25% of those who possess guns are licensed. Many may dispute this, but a man in Mr McCoomb's position at the time he made this statement would have known the true situation, we would hope.

With today's technology, it is possible for any figure in authority to electronically check the currency or legality of any licensed firearm. For many, the added financial burden is unwarranted, unfair and sometimes unaffordable, and the perception of any one of these things may be enough to stop someone from complying with the requirements of law. The non-compliance rate is extremely high, and

procedures which are or appear to be excessive or which duplicate do not encourage compliance, especially when many people who possess firearms are opposed to the laws as they exist at this time but, under sufferance, do comply.

It is well known that there are many people who oppose the gun laws outright and many who reluctantly registered because they did not want to be labelled a criminal. There was a case very recently where a gentleman who wanted to possess a firearm was approached by ASIO to be interviewed because of—in the view of ASIO—his extreme beliefs. Because he wanted some protection, he asked the officers whether he could tape the interview. They refused. After a long period of haggling, he said, "Well, you shouldn't have to say anything to me that couldn't possibly be recorded." The officers then left. I believe that he was right in the stance he took. When he came and talked to me about the situation I said, "Give them a ring, and if you want a second party to be there, I will be there for you." He rang them, and they said, basically, "We have learnt all we need to know about extreme elements." Why is a man who wants to own a gun and who wants to protect everything he says when approached by ASIO classed as extreme because of a hobby?

It would not take much to encourage those—like this fellow—who move around a bit and who are opposed to authority and regulation or just a little complacent to drop off the register altogether or simply fail to register at all if a firearm comes into their possession. This is a very likely scenario, as the acquisition of a firearm in Queensland is not a difficult exercise. Most members of this House would probably be able to lay their hands on an unregistered firearm tomorrow. That would not be inconceivable to anyone I know.

Legislation is altered every day. I heard the Minister say to the member for Merrimac, "Let's see you stand behind your legislation." I have often seen legislation changed in this place, so I can see no reason why legislation that enhances and does not alter previously enacted legislation should not be supported. I do so in this instance because I believe the member for Thuringowa has presented a very reasonable Bill for this House to endorse.
