



Speech by

RAY HOPPER

MEMBER FOR DARLING DOWNS

Hansard 6 December 2001

WEAPONS AMENDMENT REGULATION [No. 1] 2001

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—Ind) (4.24 p.m.): I rise to support this motion in the House today moved by the honourable member for Gladstone. As members are all aware of my background—my property, my dairy farm and the part-time position that I held as a dogger for the Wambo Shire Council—I feel that I have to support this disallowance motion today.

I have always been a keen shooter and I always will be. I have some very dear friends in the Sporting Shooters Association. I will just name a couple of them. Mr Dan and Mrs Jan Lindsay and Gordon Ferguson, who have represented Queensland, reside in my electorate. Rural people such as those people, just to name a couple, are now only just coming to grips with the horrific changes that our gun laws have caused to their lifestyles.

The point I make is that I believe that the government is starting to achieve what it set out to achieve. Even though I totally disagree with gun laws, I can say that the problem people who really rebelled against these laws are now starting to accept what has happened. Any changes in fees and charges will only upset those people. That is not to mention all of those who did the right thing, those who got a licence straightaway and got a gun cabinet and so on. I do not mean to disregard them at all. I have heard of people who do not yet have a gun cabinet, but let me tell members that they are getting used to the law and I have no doubt that they will eventually adhere to it.

When gun laws were introduced, some of people's biggest fears were that, as soon as they were established, the government would put up the fees. Sure enough, that is exactly what is going to happen now. Rural people are not criminals, yet they have been treated as such. They simply do not need another charge imposed upon them at this time. It can only cause the whole weapons legislation to take a major step backwards. That is exactly what is going to happen.

From what I can make out, the five-year licences are now expiring—or are going to expire soon—and no doubt there will be a cost involved in their renewal. I have a simple proposition: let us extend the time from five years to 10 years or 20 years, or give people a lifetime licence. Then we will not have the problem of administering licences to gun owners. If people pass the test in the first place, unless they commit a crime, break the law and then have to have their guns taken off them, they can have a lifetime licence and there is no problem at all.

The government states that there is a need for a significant expansion of staffing and systems at the Weapons Licensing Branch because there are 191,109 licences. Over a five-year period, that really does not amount to many licences being issued as the licences come up for renewal. I sincerely hope that these extra staff are not employed to overpolice those who may not yet have got their act together. The government speaks of an extra 27 staff. That really annoys me when I cannot even get two PLOs for the town of Dalby. The government states that, in addition to these immediate fee changes, it is intended to adjust weapons licensing fees on an annual basis in line with the CPI adjustments. Personally, I believe that, in increasing these charges, the government is just preparing the way for what is ahead. I have no doubt that the government will keep jacking up the fees until in a number of years time it will be just too expensive for people to hold a weapons licence and both federal and state governments can have their way.

I ask all members to vote with the member for Gladstone and at the least allow this legislation to be presented to the House for debate at another time. This is just another cost imposed on our decent,

law-abiding gun owners who have to now pay an extra fee and the criminals out there will still get away with what they do. They will never pay the fees because they will not ever get a weapons licence.

No doubt firearms will always be a contentious issue. This motion is trying to address an impost that will totally break down the acceptance of what the government has achieved over the past 10 years. To own a firearm is the right of all rural Australians. At all times this right must be protected. I firmly believe that the amendment of the weapons legislation is wrong. I strongly support the disallowance motion.
