



Speech by

**RONAN LEE**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY**

---

Hansard 6 December 2001

**WEAPONS AMENDMENT REGULATION [No. 1] 2001**

**Mr LEE** (Indooroopilly—ALP) (4.15 p.m.): I am pleased to rise to oppose the motion for disallowance to the Weapons Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2001. It never ceases to amaze me how it is that the National Party gets so fired up about anything in this parliament that has absolutely anything to do with guns. Prior to the lunch break when we debated the Guardianship and Administration and Other Acts Amendment Bill, which was immensely significant to a large number of people in Queensland, and it was like a morgue on the opposition benches throughout that debate. The opposition comes in here to quibble over what is essentially an increase of \$2—

**Mr Cummins:** Per year.

**Mr LEE:** It is an increase of \$2 per year on a firearms licence. I am stunned by how passionate they become about these things. It costs more to renew a licence to drive a car, yet the opposition wishes to quibble over a \$2 per year increase on fees for licences for firearms.

**Mr Cummins:** Four cents a week.

**Mr LEE:** The member for Kawana tells me it is 4c a week. We really have to wonder when members opposite are concerned about a 4c per week increase in a firearm licence fee. A member who spoke earlier was concerned that, to become licensed, people need to be able to demonstrate an ability to safely handle a firearm. In the same way, it must be really tough for 18-year-old kids who know how to drive a car but have never done a driving test. If a person needs to prove that they have a skill in a particular area, for the benefit of the rest of the community the role of government is to ensure that the person genuinely has that skill.

It would be lovely to take on trust, as the member for Gregory seems to be suggesting, that someone who has a demonstrated ability to safely handle a firearm should be given able to do it. It would be lovely to take that on trust. It would be lovely to be able to take on trust that people who feel they genuinely have an ability to drive a car safely should be able to do that without having a driving lesson or passing a driving test. It would be lovely to take on trust that people who might like to drive a train, a plane or a semitrailer can be trusted to actually say, yes, they genuinely have the requisite skill in that area. But the fact is that it is the government's role to prove that these people have that particular skill. It is not the government's role to take on trust what someone says about their skills, particularly with firearms. If we were to do that we would potentially be playing with people's lives. That to me is a real concern and is exceptionally dangerous.

I feel that the regulation is the only realistic option. It enables the system of continued comprehensive weapons licensing services to be maintained whilst making provision for the relicensing program. In the interests and principles of the Weapons Act a regulatory impact statement was released by the Beattie government. It outlined the available options and sought public comment on the amendments.

I would like to deal with the three options that were put forward. Option one was to make no change to the current fee structure. It is an option that would have seen no change at all. There is no way of avoiding increased administrative costs, particularly when an expanded weapons licensing branch is essential to meet the high volume of licensing demand. No changes to the fee structure would result in the general public having to bear the full costs of this expansion.

The status quo option also fails to apply the user-pays principles, so licensed weapons users would attain a higher level of service without making any greater contribution. The direct cost to the community is that the current level of protection and safety afforded by the weapons licensing program will be placed under threat with the increased relicensing demands on the Weapons Licensing Branch. Further, there is a cost to licensed persons, bodies or businesses under the act. Insufficient funding for the effective and efficient management of weapons licensing services would result in significant time delays in processing applications for licences and renewal applications. These delays might result in an inability to renew licence applications before the expiry of the licence. This would result in weapons licence holders having to reapply for a new weapons licence. The resultant impact of not varying the fees to recover additional funds would be a reduction in the level of service provided.

To me, that option is completely unacceptable. It is completely unacceptable to me that someone who wants to own a firearm is not prepared to pay an extra two bucks a year to have a licence to use that firearm. It is all very well and good to say that these people are law-abiding citizens—and I have no doubt that they are—but it is completely unacceptable for law-abiding citizens who want to own a firearm to expect that the community as a whole, out of general revenue, would absorb increases in the costs of regulating and licensing their area of interest.

Option two is imposing a state-wide tax on all Queenslanders to generate sufficient funding for the relicensing of existing weapons holders and to maintain weapons licensing services for existing and new weapons licence applications. This option would have enabled the continuation of the existing levels of community protection and safety in accordance with the principles of the act. However, it would come at the expense of the community. The benefit to weapons licence holders with this option is the continuation of the current subsidisation of fees incurred for firearms or weapons licensing relative to the actual costs for licensing services and monitoring services provided. This option avoids bringing increased direct costs onto weapons licensed persons, bodies or businesses. To me, that is completely unacceptable. It is completely unacceptable that money would be diverted from education, police and health because people who own guns object to paying two bucks extra a year for their licence.

The third option that was canvassed was an amendment to the weapons regulation as proposed, which would maintain the existing level of community safety and protection as provided by the act and provide sufficient funding to meet relicensing demands and increased cost recovery of weapons licensing services. Importantly, this amendment regulation alleviates the risks to the community and those persons already licensed under the Weapons Act that doing nothing or reducing the services provided by the Weapons Licensing Branch might bring. The proposed fee increase would have the effect of reducing government subsidisation of weapons licensing services by properly requiring a fair and equitable contribution from persons who gained a benefit from the administration of weapons licences.

This amendment regulation is an overdue change to the current arrangement of administration of the act which is fully supported by government appropriation. The amendment regulation is appropriate, because licensees under the Weapons Act have been offered substantial support over many years. Firstly, there has been no increase in weapons licensing fees for at least the past 10 years. Secondly, when licensees were transferred to the new system in 1997-98, no new licence fees were applied. Thirdly, despite increasing costs to the Weapons Licensing Branch, there has been no increase in fees. These are among the reasons that I oppose this motion of disallowance.

In conclusion, can I just say that we really know that a political party is in a lot of trouble—we do not necessarily need to look at the polls to know that—when, philosophically, the issues that drive them are issues such as this one. I am really concerned for a democratic process that sees the opposition sit all but silent on an issue such as the Guardianship and Administration and Other Acts Amendment Bill, which is a wonderful bill and a great achievement of this government, yet gets so hot under the collar over two bucks a year to own a firearm. They are positively foaming at the mouth over two dollars a year to own a firearm. To me, that is a great shame.

---