



Speech by

**Hon. T. McGRADY**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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Hansard 6 December 2001

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

**Hon. T. McGRADY** (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province) (4.40 p.m.), in reply: I was going to thank all honourable members for their contributions, but that is not my role tonight. I cannot believe some of the comments I have heard tonight from some members of the opposition—and I say 'some'. Tonight I have heard the expression 'law-abiding citizens' about 25 times, as if there were some attack by the government on law-abiding citizens. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have heard the word 'criminals' being used. Again, there is no suggestion at all from this side of the chamber that people who own guns are criminals.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke of this government as being arrogant. There is nothing arrogant or sinister about what we are trying to do; it is just a straightforward housekeeping decision by the government. I did not wake up one morning and decide to make these changes. These changes came about as a result of discussions among the Queensland Police Service, the government and me as the minister.

Basically, today we are talking about a \$2 a year increase in the cost of a gun licence. However, tonight the real issue is that what has been demonstrated to me is that the Mike Horan National Party has today advocated that money should come from the Police budget to administer this scheme. That means that we either reduce the number of police officers we are employing, we reduce the resources to the Queensland Police Service, we reduce many other activities which the Queensland Police Service does, or we take money from the Education, Health, Transport or Families budgets. The opposition cannot have it both ways. The Queensland Police Service has demonstrated to me that it requires an increase in its budget to facilitate these changes.

It is all very well to talk about gun control and so on, but let us go back to April 1996, when this country suffered its single worst gun related tragedy, which came to be known as the Port Arthur massacre—a horrific event that this nation will never, ever forget. In the same year, it was the Queensland coalition government that supported the implementation of legislation activated by the current Prime Minister. That is what happened. The Prime Minister led the charge. The coalition government, led by Mr Borbidge and Mrs Sheldon, were the ones who—quite rightly—went along with the dictates of the Prime Minister. I am sure that members opposite, some of whom were members of that coalition government, would agree with the legislation—and they still do.

However, tonight the question that I have been waiting to hear the answer to is: what is the role of the Liberal Party? I am a little disappointed by the comments of the Liberal leader. I would have expected to enjoy their support in opposing the motion before the parliament, considering the Prime Minister's key role in implementing national gun reform. I would also expect their agreement given the Liberal Party's stated support of user pays systems. This is basically about a \$2 per year increase to allow the Queensland Police Service to administer gun control in our state. It is as simple as that.

**Dr Watson:** It's way above the CPI.

**Mr McGRADY:** We are talking about \$2 per year, which still makes Queensland's charges lower than those in the other states with the exception, I understand, of the Northern Territory. As the member for Indooroopilly stated earlier, members opposite are getting all hot and sweaty about this issue—\$2 per year or, as somebody said, 4c a week. That is what this is all about.

Let me highlight the duties of the Weapons Licensing Branch. It carries out the functions and duties of the authorised officer under the act and the delegated duties of the commissioner, and the provision of accurate and current records on the weapons computer system of all licences, authorities, registered weapons and restricted weapons. It is not just a matter of a police officer or indeed a civilian sitting at a window waiting for somebody to come in and pay their fee. They also have numerous other responsibilities.

All honourable members in this parliament should recognise that these duties which underpin the maintenance of a strict system of checks associated with weapons ownership are essential to make this legislation effective. Prior to the weapons amendment regulation it was recognised that this workload could be managed only through a significant expansion of staffing and systems of the Queensland Police Service's weapons branch. This afternoon we have heard a lot about the 27 additional staff. There will be 27 additional staff. I want them to be civilians, because I want to see fully trained professional policemen and woman out in the community doing what they have been trained to do. I do not want to see our police officers sitting behind desks doing this sort of work. The bulk of these 27 additional staff will be civilians and they will be there supporting and being supported by those professional men and women.

There has been no increase in weapons licensing fees for at least the past 10 years. No new licence fees were applied when licensees were transferred to the new system in 1997-98. Under current arrangements, administration of the Weapons Act is fully supported by government appropriation, recognising the modest revenue from the current fee structure. For these reasons, together with the need to fund the identified relicensing need, the objects underlying these legislative initiatives are, firstly, to provide sufficient funding to meet additional costs associated with the forthcoming weapons relicensing requirement.

Another point mentioned tonight is that every single person who owns a licence should receive a letter. What a massive impost that would be on the taxpayers of the state. I conclude by repeating that I did not wake up one morning and decide that this was a good idea. There have been advertisements so that the public could have their say. In addition, consultation was undertaken with the Sporting Shooters of Australia; the Shooting Association, Queensland; the Arms Collectors Guild, Queensland; the Military Rifle Association, Queensland; the Small Bore Air Rifle Association, Queensland; the Amateur Pistol Shooting Association, Queensland; the Australian Service Rifle Association, Queensland; the Firearms Dealers Association, Queensland; the Security Industry Regulatory Council, Queensland; and Agforce, Queensland.

During this process one stakeholder, the Security Industry Regulatory Council, asserted that the fee increases and licence application fee were long overdue and that fees had been far too low for some years. Obviously all those organisations did not agree with the increases, but all were consulted. So in terms of this nonsense that we hear from the opposition that there has been no consultation, I treat that with the contempt it deserves.

In the main, this issue concerns a \$2 per year increase in the cost of the licence. It is true that there will be a licensing fee for new applicants, but those who already have the licence will not be affected. I know this is a touchy subject and that people have strong and passionate views, but this is about an increase of \$2 per year. I ask parliament to reject this motion and to let us get on with the job of creating a Police Service in this state which rises to the needs of the population.

In conclusion, I once again denounce the Leader of the Opposition's comment, because it is all very well to stand up and say that this is a raid on the public purse. The facts of life are quite simple. This is a service which the people of Queensland expect and demand. We are no different from any other state. The fact is that somebody, somewhere, has to pay. If we were to meet these costs from the normal Police budget, it would simply mean fewer police officers, less resources, fewer cars and fewer computers for the serving police officers. If that is what members of the opposition want, let them tell the people of Queensland. The other alternative is to increase taxes. Let members opposite tell us whether they want to increase taxes. Or, if members opposite want this to come out of consolidated revenue, tell us where these cuts will come from—Health, Education, Families, Transport or Housing. We cannot have it both ways. Stand up and tell us where the dollars will come from. I appeal to all members of this House to reject the motion.

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