



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

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WEAPONS AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (12.44 p.m.): The member for Warrego just stated that this is good legislation. I find myself agreeing with him. I might say that it is not the first time that I have agreed with the member, but I thank him very much for his good speech. This is good legislation and I rise to speak in support of it.

Mr Purcell: I thought the member for Warrego was very sensible. Well done!

Mr BRISKEY: Yes, we thank the member for his support for this bill and also for his support for the current Police Minister, who is doing an excellent job.

This bill contains amendments to the Weapons Act that seek to reduce the level of illegal firearm ownership by legislating for a new weapons amnesty. The changes will allow the Commissioner of Police to call for a weapons amnesty, during which time unlicensed firearm owners will be called upon to do the right thing and assist us to decrease the number of illegal firearms in our community.

Data from the nationally recorded Crime Australia Data Collection shows that there have been significant changes in weapons and firearms use over recent years. During the period 1995-2001, the proportion of murder victims who were attacked with a weapon peaked at 78 per cent in 1996. We all know why that year was such a horrendous year. Since that time to 2000-01, the proportion of murders involving a weapon fell to about 60 per cent. Over that period, the rate of victims of murder involving a weapon fell by 21 per cent.

The overall decrease in weapon use reflects largely the decrease in the use of firearms. In 2001, 16 per cent of murder victims were killed by a firearm compared with 32 per cent in 1996. However, this research shows that a person was more likely to be a victim of crime where a firearm was used in 2001 than they were in 1995, with the exception of murder, and a firearm was the more predominant weapon type for kidnappings and abductions involving a firearm in 2001 than it was in 1995.

There is no doubt that this decrease in the use of firearms is related to the availability of firearms within our community. While we have come quite a way since the last amnesty, which followed the Port Arthur massacre in 1996, still more can be done. Despite the surrender of 130,000 firearms in Queensland during the last amnesty, there is still a large number of illegal firearms on our streets. In fact, according to the Australian Institute of Criminology, between 1994 and 2000 a total of 25,171 firearms were reported stolen. This equates to an average of about 12 firearms reported stolen each day, or more than 4,000 annually.

We know already that amnesties work. People in possession of illegal firearms have the opportunity to either obtain a licence or surrender the firearms to the state without fear of prosecution. As a government, we have a duty to protect Queenslanders, and the amendments contained in this legislation will provide the necessary mechanisms for a future amnesty in Queensland. The motivation behind the new amendments is, of course, to reduce the number of illegal weapons in Queensland. This bill also seeks to toughen the legislation so that the requirements for a licensed gun owner to be a fit and proper person applies throughout the life of the licence. As an example, if a person commits an act of domestic violence, the bill clarifies powers to revoke the person's weapons licence.

Law-abiding gun owners will welcome the amendments to the bill, which remove the requirement to lodge a renewal application at least 14 days prior to expiry and instead provide an extension of licence validity until the renewal application is decided. It will allow a person to provide evidence that they have possessed a valid firearms licence within the previous six months as proof of weapons competency. That means that a person whose licence has lapsed will not have to complete another weapons competency and training course.

I want to briefly touch on the amendments to the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act of 2000 as contained in the bill. This government is very concerned about the effects of drugs and drug-related crime in our community. As part of our tough on crime approach we have continued and will continue to combat the scourge of drugs by being tough on drug manufacturers, traffickers and dealers. In the past 12 months we have seen the expansion of the extremely effective police tactical response squads, the highly successful illicit market scan to pinpoint illicit drug markets and by investing in drug detection machines and sniffer dogs to assist operational police with drug detection. I know that every member of this House would agree that our police are doing a great job in this area.

As members would be aware, in May last year the government delivered on an election commitment by introducing two drug dogs with specialist training in the detection of powder narcotics such as heroin, cocaine, amphetamine, ecstasy and ice. The use of these specially trained canines has resulted in some great results for the Queensland Police Service. In order for these dogs to be trained to their maximum effectiveness, however, it is necessary to make amendments to the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 to establish a strict regulatory regime to allow police to retain dangerous drugs for training purposes.

I should point out that, under the new amendments, police will not be able to obtain drugs by illegal means. The legislation ensures that the drugs will be stored and handled in an appropriate manner and will be subjected to strict tracking and accountability requirements. The passage of this legislation will allow for the expansion of this successful anti-drug initiative and further bolster this government's fight against drugs. I commend the Bill to the House.