



Speech by

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WEAPONS [HANDGUNS AND TRAFFICKING] AMENDMENT BILL

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (12.31 a.m.): I have no doubt that there will be no surprise shown in this House when I say that this bill, the Weapons (Handguns and Trafficking) Amendment Bill, has raised quite a bit of interest within the Gympie electorate. Before I begin to outline the questions and issues that are of concern to a number of my constituents, I place on record that the people I have met with over the years who are involved in shooting clubs and competition are responsible citizens who have a passion for the sport of shooting and who take the whole process involved very seriously. Having said that, it is important to also state that none of those people support irresponsible gun ownership or reckless behaviour. They condemn all forms of illegal gun racketeering.

Whilst I can, in part, understand the federal government's motivation for implementing stringent legislation regarding access to and the possession of firearms, the reality is that no amount of rules and regulations are going to stop a person from obtaining a firearm should they wish to do so. One only needs to look at legislation such as prohibition in the twenties and how ineffectual it was in deterring the consumption of alcohol. The sudden rise of speak-easies and sly grog premises will attest to that.

The restriction of illegal drugs and the fact that all drugs are illegal have had little effect on the extent of drug usage amongst our youth. If something is desired, it will be obtained from the black market. This is also the case with weapons such as concealable firearms. What needs to be remembered is that it only takes one weapon to cause terrible tragedies. If there is a lunatic out there who wants to go on a shooting spree, like it or not that person will find a way to do it. Pistol shooting is already heavily licensed and regulated. Bringing in more laws or banning will only affect the law abiding and will actually have the reverse effect of leading to more illegal possession than ever before.

Another aspect of gun culture that needs to be recognised is that it is rarely a registered gun owner who would commit a crime using a registered weapon. There would be very few official sporting shooters and competitors who would commit the type of crimes that this legislation is attempting to prevent. If someone was going to commit a crime, they would be more likely to use an unregistered weapon or one that has had its registration number removed and is unable to be traced. To quote a dedicated sporting shooter, registered firearms in the hands of licensed shooters on registered ranges are not the cause of crime.

Unfortunately, many people who have never used a firearm have a somewhat distorted view of the type of people who enjoy the sport of shooting. It is sad that there is a definite stigma attached to those who do enjoy shooting or who are associated with it. There is one myth that I would like to dispel here and now. Sporting shooters do not want to kill people. They are not warmongers or right-wing nutters. They are usually family men and women who enjoy the precision and technical aspects of shooting on a range. From a personal aspect, I love the sport, probably because it is one of the only sports that I am any good at. Although I have no interest in competing, I do enjoy a good shoot.

The difficulty that many of my local shooters have with this legislation is the fact that it is the serious, safety conscious and responsible sporting shooter who will be adversely affected. One specific area of concern falls under the conditions for a concealable firearms licence. I am aware of one woman who is actively involved in the sport of the International Practical Shooting Confederation at both national and international levels. She holds a number of world titles and is currently the Australian ladies

IPSC champion. This woman has a very good chance of winning the ladies title at the next world shoot, which will be held in Ecuador in 2005. In fact, there are another three Queensland women who will be contesting that title. Those women will be directly affected if calibre restrictions and magazine capacity restrictions are imposed. Ultimately, these restrictions could make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to achieve their sporting goals.

The IPSC is a sport where there are three components that are given equal recognition: speed, power and accuracy. In a major international match, 0.01 of a second could mean the difference between winning a match or coming second or third. If competitors are restricted in their magazine capacity, they are immediately placed at a disadvantage. An additional magazine change can take up to two seconds, so if 0.01 of a second could mean second or third place, two seconds could relegate even the best shooter to an uncompetitive position. The cost factor of replacement magazines with only a 10-round capacity will ensure that no international competitors will compete in Australian competitions and would force Queensland shooters to have to travel overseas on a more frequent basis to gain exposure to international competition levels. For Australians to compete, they require the standard magazine capacity of 20 rounds.

Sporting shooters are like any other sports competitors and take all aspects of their sport just as seriously. A well-known athlete lives in the electorate of Maryborough and works in my electorate. The preparation and dedication it takes to be a top sporting shooter involves the same training as any other elite athlete. This particular woman observes a rigorous training regime of diet, fitness training, strength training, flexibility training and shooting skills training. This is a daily regime of three hours on top of her full-time job. This particular woman has observed this type of training schedule for the past five years in the hope of becoming a world champion.

The issue of power is also contentious as the minimum calibre for major power factor in the standard division is 40 calibre. The inability to comply with this calibre in standard division competitions will result in minor scoring, which could once again relegate even the best competitor to an uncompetitive position. The question of calibre is particularly difficult because it is not possible to simply convert one's hand gun to 40 calibre for international matches.

As members can see, this legislation, though supported in much of its intent, leaves many grey areas for the sporting shooter fraternity. Section 177, which allows the possession of prohibited weapons during the amnesty period but prohibits their use during the amnesty, is one such area. If the prohibitions in section 132 form part of the legislation when passed, then the provision in section 177 is particularly unfair. There are shooters who have been unable to arrange for replacement equipment to conform with the proposed legislation as there has been much uncertainty as to whether exemptions for IPSC competitors will be granted. It will take at least three months to import replacement equipment and the effect of section 177 will be that some sporting shooters will be unable to train until the replacement equipment is available. This will seriously compromise training for the US nationals to be held in September this year and the Oceania Games to be held in November. Another problem for local competitors is the fact that the Prime Minister has only flagged the accreditation of two events, those being the single action shooting and the metallic silhouette, whilst the IPSC remains in abeyance.

The shooters with whom I have been in contact are keen to adhere to rules and conditions of responsible gun ownership, but they fear that some of this legislation is aimed at dissuading people from taking up the sport due to the numerous impediments to obtaining a licence such as the mandatory participation rates.

On a personal note, a few weeks ago I was planning to join a local club of mine but, due to the nature of my job, I could not be certain of being able to meet the minimum required events and criteria. The fact that police may be able to enter a house without a warrant to seize hand guns belonging to a sporting shooter simply because the shooter had not attended sufficient competitions is unreasonable and ridiculous. I am sure that the police would rather spend their precious time cleaning up the unlicensed traffickers than chasing some person who has been unable to attend X number of shoots. I fail to see how forcing shooters to shoot X number of times will assist in reducing crime.

Like I mentioned previously, no sensible shooter wants to see a lunatic in possession of a dangerous weapon. However, a weapon could include a car, a knife, a rope or a blunt object. Not all murders and robberies are carried out with guns. All sporting shooters would like nothing more than to see their sport recognised as a legitimate and safe sport. They want to see illegal guns off the streets, but hurting the genuine gun owner is not the answer.

We all despise crime and, believe me, I have seen my fair share in 28 years of living in Sydney. When I was overseas a gun was pointed at my mother and myself. I know what fear is like, but I know that penalising the law abiding citizen will not have any positive effect on crime rates and statistics.

I do not know how much people in this House know about the military. During military training, particularly in the Army—and I do not know if this is still the case—we were taught to assemble and disassemble a rifle with our eyes closed. We ate, worked, ran and slept with our weapons. They were

not allowed out of our sight. If we did manage to get up and walk away from our rifles we certainly never made that mistake again. I can honestly say that, among the hundreds of servicemen and women I came across, not one person did not learn to respect the weapon for what it was. The point I am trying to make is that just because you have a weapon does not mean you are going to go and kill someone. To be honest, the only person I ever knew who went off the rails was a commando. With the easy access to firearms he had, it was not a rifle or a hand gun with which he chose to terrorise people. No, it was his bayonet—obviously his weapon of choice.

I sincerely hope that the minister will take my constituents' concerns on board so that they may continue to participate in their sport of choice at local, national and international levels and not be penalised due to the actions of others. We should be applauding the genuine and legitimate shooters rather than making them the scapegoats for the criminal element of this society. Sporting shooters do not commit crimes; criminals do.