



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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WEAPONS [HANDGUNS AND TRAFFICKING] AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (2.25 a.m.): Recently, I addressed my local branch of the Queensland War Widows Guild. I know that at this time of the morning members would be vitally interested in the address that I provided to that very good organisation and its relevance to this debate. On that occasion, the subject that I addressed was very relevant to this debate. I spoke to the Queensland War Widows Guild about whether it was appropriate to entrench a constitutional change to establish a bill of rights for Queensland and, indeed, for Australia.

This debate certainly brings home the validity of the view that I expressed, and that of the previous committee report to this parliament, which recommended that we should not have an entrenched bill of rights in Queensland. This legislation, the Weapons (Handguns and Trafficking) Amendment Bill 2003, certainly shows that it is important for a legislature to be able to adjust and finetune legislation in this area without major concern and recourse to generalised statements of the nature that exist in the American constitution, in particular, the often touted amendment that comes from the Right Wing parties in this country, that is, the right to bear arms. That would be a very inhibiting and restricting feature if it was to exist in our landscape. Certainly, any variation of it might restrict the capacity of our legislatures throughout Australia to directly address this area of regulation and to set laws that specifically establish requirements for the control of guns—both hand guns and other forms of military guns and rifles.

I am very pleased to support this legislation. It is indeed another step in what we have seen in recent times in Australia—an inexorable march towards tighter regulation. This march towards tighter regulation has been a direct response to very tragic events in Australia, going back to Port Arthur and indeed the recent events in relation to a shooting in Victoria. This is another development in reaction to those events.

Whilst the wider community is reacting to those events, the wider community also needs to recognise that there is a good number of sincere and legitimate sports people who are gun owners and hobbyists. Those people derive a great deal of pleasure from a preoccupation with various forms of weaponry, both in the care of those items, the making of bullets, et cetera and the maintenance of the weapons. There are a range of activities that bring those people a lot of pleasure. Indeed, ultimately, those activities have been shown to be the source of establishing great achievement for Australians because Australia has done very well at international competition in shooting sports.

This legislation requires balance to make it workable. I trust that the minister has considered the various submissions before him to ensure that that balance is achieved. I have been assured by the minister's office that extensive consultation has occurred with the various associations.

I have been drawn into a closer interest in this legislation via representations that I have received from representatives of the Queensland Military Rifle Club. That club operates out of the Belmont rifle range. The club has an interest in military rifles, the preservation of the original form of those rifles, and the various aspects of procedure and target practice, the traditions of which this club is devoted to maintaining. I have conveyed to the minister via his office a number of matters that have been raised by this association. I understand that his office has been closely considering those representations. I have also arranged for further representations to be made with the police officers who have been involved directly in the drafting of this legislation and advising the minister.

I would like to allude to a number of concepts that, as I understand it, are the major residual issues that would be a priority for that organisation if the minister was to consider any final amendments in the committee stage or if he were to at least provide a response that may give this association some further understanding of the reasoning that has been adopted in deriving this legislation. Indeed, I have encouraged the organisation to prioritise the elements that it saw as important in making this legislation workable.

There are three elements that the Queensland Military Rifle Club has indicated that it sees as still requiring attention or seeks a response from the minister. Those elements are the removal of the concept of classes of hand guns, that the minimum number of competitions be four, and the removal of a requirement for the authorised officer to endorse a collector's licence for the purpose of collecting temporarily inoperable modern hand guns. If the minister is able to provide that organisation with any further enlightenment as to what consideration has been given to those elements, it would be very much appreciated by my constituent in particular and the organisation in general.

This legislation has been the result of a long process of meetings involving representatives of police ministers from each state and the Commonwealth. There has been a lot of inertia behind the preparation of this legislation at a national level. Indeed, at this late stage I would certainly appreciate that it is very difficult to undertake finetuning when so much preparation has been under way and so much effort has been put into ensuring that there is consistency in the legislation across the states.

I commend the minister for the fundamental intent of the legislation and the extensive work that obviously has occurred in working with other states and the Commonwealth in coordinating the resultant legislation. I commend the bill to the House.