



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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WEAPONS AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (12.28 p.m.): I will never forget the grief and distress felt by the Bettridge family of Camp Hill when 2-year-old Kiah Bettridge, her mother and grandfather were gunned down outside their house in Camp Hill about 10 years ago. Kiah's father was a law-abiding citizen—that was until he lost control and murdered his family. Sometimes it does not take much for law-abiding citizens to lose control, reach for a gun and seriously injure themselves or others. It takes common life stresses; stresses that we all endure, such as relationship breakdown, job loss, rage at a wrongdoing. I commend this bill to the House as it contains provisions that further control the licensing of, and access to, guns.

I also commend to the minister and offer my support on any ongoing action that will, firstly, halt the illegal import of guns and, secondly, substantially reduce the availability of hand guns. I welcome the minister's contribution to a special meeting in November 2002, convened by the Prime Minister and other police ministers around the nation who looked at a lot of recommendations relating to the control of hand guns. They are very important measures, and I commend to the minister the good work that he is doing in seeking to control hand guns as well.

There are three key principles that must solidly underpin any public policy on gun control. Firstly, owning a gun is a privilege and not a right; secondly, protecting the public from gun injury or death must be paramount over the recreational interests of gun users; and, thirdly, public safety must be improved through strict controls on the possession and storage of weapons. On this, the facts speak for themselves. There was a decrease of almost 30 per cent in the number of homicides by firearms from 1997 to 1999. That is following on from the strict new gun control legislation that was introduced in 1996.

The Australian rate of gun deaths per 100,000 people remains one-fifth that of the United States. We have stricter controls on guns. They have a crazy system of a right to bear arms, almost. There are millions and millions of guns in the hands of the wrong people in the United States and its death rate is a testament to that.

We have also observed a decline in firearm related death rates, essentially in firearm related suicides, in most parts of Australia. We have also seen a declining trend in the percentage of robberies involving the use of firearms. These findings are all based on research available through the Australian Institute of Criminology. It is very important that we continue to tightly regulate access to guns and continue to see a downward trend in the rates of suicide, homicide and serious injury related to guns.

Why on earth would we need 250,000-plus hand guns in the hands of civilians in Australia? Why would we need a rifle in one in four households? The public certainly does not want the threat posed by the prevalence of guns. Newspoll found in 2002 that, of those surveyed, 83 per cent favour stricter hand gun control. Defence personnel, police and law enforcement agents have an argument for access to guns. Pastoralists, graziers and other related workers can stake a fair claim to access guns but under very strict conditions. Sporting shooters, although I do not favour shooting as a sport, can argue their claim to access guns but, again, under very strict controls.

The amnesty provisions in this bill provide the tools to further reduce gun access by enabling law-abiding citizens to hand in illegal weapons. We need to continue these sorts of measures. I commend the minister for the work he is doing in this legislation and in further measures that will be taken in months and years to come.

It is certainly frightening to see what is happening in America. When this bill was introduced I looked at America's National Rifle Association web site. It was very disturbing to see that this major pro-gun lobby has an online pledge system. At the time I looked, in early December last year, \$64 million had been pledged to the National Rifle Association to continue its work of lobbying governments around the world to not limit access to guns.

The NRA is a very powerful lobby. I would not be surprised if the One Nation party, through its emergence in Australia, got financial and other support from the National Rifle Association. I would like to ask Mr Flynn—he is not present in the House—whether he or other members of the One Nation party currently link with the National Rifle Association and get any support. It is a very powerful and dangerous organisation in many respects, and it is certainly frightening to think it has that level of resourcing behind it. We do not have anything like that in Australia, thankfully, but we certainly have organisations such as that internationally, particularly in the United States, trying to get governments to wind back and water down our laws in Australia.

It was disturbing to see in the so-called National-Liberal agreement, released to the media on Monday, that they do not have a strong statement on gun control. As the Premier said in the House earlier this week, it is a Clayton's agreement and the provisions in relation to gun control are very Clayton-like.

Mr Shine: Two bob each way.

Ms STRUTHERS: As the member for Toowoomba North has said, they are having two bob each way. In fact, it is really suggesting that they would water down gun laws if they regained power in this state. We know from reading between the lines of their document that that is effectively what they would do.

If they were re-elected they would seek an opportunity very early on to water down gun laws. As I said earlier, 83 per cent of the public does not want that; it wants strict controls on guns. I can assure members of the public that I, as a member of the Labor Party, and the Labor government are very committed to public safety. The public of Queensland can be assured that our government is putting their safety first. I commend the local police in my area who are implementing these laws. They are doing a great job around Acacia Ridge, Calamvale and other parts of my electorate. I wish them well in implementing the new legislation.