



Speech by

Hon. K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

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WEAPONS [HANDGUNS AND TRAFFICKING] AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (2.35 a.m.): In 1996-97, weapons legislation changed everything as far as gun control in Australia was concerned. Obviously, it polarised many people's opinions. However, that is history and what we have to deal with now is the present.

There is no doubt that in the early 2000s everybody, regardless of their opinion, was concerned that there was still the massive illegal importation of guns into Australia. Any thought that there were only two or three containers out of 100 coming into Australia that were being checked was quite obviously upsetting to many people. Obviously, illegal trafficking was still going on. Certainly within the shooting club—and I belong to a pistol club—most members agreed that something had to be done as far as regulations within those clubs were concerned.

When the new legislation was to be prepared after the Monash incident, the National Party made very strong representations through people like John Anderson. We tried to ensure that primary producers were not affected and people who were involved in the occupational use of hand guns were not affected. That was the guarantee we received. I have written to my constituents and asked anyone who believes that they are affected as a rural land-holder in their use of guns to please contact me. I have not had one touch. There is no doubt that I have received many representations from the shooting clubs. Everyone believed that some regulations had to be changed. The difficulty is that, as we change the regulations, people see many anomalies occurring. The minister and all those responsible for the legislation must allow us to continue to change the regulations when we do find anomalies, because they will certainly occur.

The pistol clubs, through the International Shooting Sports Federation, have obviously been concerned about some of the statements that have been made about shooting clubs and people who use hand guns. Statements such as target pistol shooting is a dangerous sport is obviously objectionable to those people who use pistols and are involved in shooting clubs. As they say, from the time that target pistol shooting first started in Australia in 1928, there has not been a single case of a person being injured or killed as a result of owning or using a target pistol.

Anyone who went to a shooting club and saw the very strict rules that all people who participate in shooting at pistol clubs have to adhere to would be quite surprised. The myth that target pistol shooters are dangerous people is quite obviously objectionable. It is a myth that it is too easy to get hold of a pistol. People who have not had any experience in trying to get a category H licence would be amazed at the learning programs that one has to go through, the seminars that one has to attend before one can even start to apply and then the investigation that must be carried out by police.

When trying to buy a pistol people have to go through a cooling-off period before they can take that pistol to a regulated gun place for the purchase of that particular pistol. All of this is quite amazing. Any thought that those regulations are not strong enough is certainly misguided.

The statement that pistols are designed solely to kill people is completely incorrect. Those people who have a shooting pistol know full well that it really is only for use at targets. It is completely impractical for use out in the open to shoot animals or to use it for anything else like that.

Target pistol shooting was one of the inaugural sports in the program of the first modern Olympics. There are five pistol disciplines at the Olympic level: the men's 50-metre pistol match, the men's 25-metre rapid fire, the men's 10-metre air pistol, the women's 10-metre air pistol, and the women's 25-metre sports pistol. I do not think that anyone who does not believe in the use of hand guns would say that these sports should be taken from the Olympic level program.

It is important too for people to understand that the targets used by ISSF pistol shooters are round bullseye targets which are usually divided into 10 scoring rings. No man-shaped targets are used. It is also important for people who have not had experience in pistol shooting to realise that there are rapid-fire programs where a target turns around for seven seconds, comes back for three and turns back for seven. Therefore, any thought that someone has only a single shot at pistol shooting is not practical for those types of sports. There are those sports where someone could just load one round after another, but when they are shooting at those sorts of targets, quite obviously a semiautomatic is necessary.

ISSF target shooting appeals to those people who enjoy the challenge of a difficult yet rewarding sport which demands great self-control and concentration. It is particularly appealing for women, who quickly learn that they can compete on equal terms with men. I believe that it is women in the Australian sport who have had the most success as far as the Olympic standard is concerned. ISSF pistol shooting also has great appeal for those people who suffer from a wide range of disabilities, including those who are wheelchair bound and amputees.

The current campaign to have semiautomatic pistols and revolvers confiscated from the target sports shooters who use them in their matches is completely unrealistic, as I have just said. Certainly in the rapid fire programs it is necessary for those semiautomatic five-load or maybe 10-load. Most shooting clubs allow shooters to load only five rounds.

I also wish to comment on those provisions in the regulations that set down the number of shoots in which a person must participate in a year. I believe that some of those provisions may have gone too far. Most clubs have strict regulations about the number of times they can shoot during a week because they have come to an agreement with neighbours. Those neighbours may have given their approval for a shooting club to build a building close to their house on the condition that perhaps one night shoot and a Saturday afternoon shoot per week are allowed. That is okay for some shooters, but of course it is very difficult for some people to attend on a Saturday afternoon, especially for members of parliament. If Wednesday night is the only night that people are allowed to shoot and that ends up being a Rotary night, they may go through a period for one or two years when it is very difficult to turn up for half a dozen or eight shoots per year. It may be that they have a medical condition such as arthritis in the elbow that prevents them from shooting for six months. It is very difficult for people in those circumstances to have a regulation whereby they must surrender their pistols if they do not shoot eight times per year.

I do believe there is a section within the legislation which allows for that club to make a statement that this particular person has not been able to shoot for 12 months because of a medical condition, or perhaps they can prove that every Wednesday night they go to Rotary and every Saturday they go to some other function and therefore have not been able to shoot. I believe that the bill should allow for that shooter to still be able to keep his weapons for a certain period. That is one area about which most people who have contacted me have been particularly upset.

This bill will also result in there being a demand on local officials. Forty people might turn up for a shoot and one person has to be in charge of the range. It is not easy being in charge of the range as well as enjoying a shoot yourself that particular night. If the government makes it too difficult to control the shoot on that particular night, quite obviously we will find that these clubs will break down. There is no way that a club can afford to have a paid official to go through the process of checking the people who sign in, checking their equipment and controlling the shoot of the night. It is not just a matter of standing there shooting at still targets; it is a matter of someone controlling the turning targets, and that is demanding.

As I have said, the number of shoots should be monitored. If it turns out to be completely impractical, I believe that regulations in the future should allow for that. Even though I belong to a shooting club myself and I have concerns about this legislation, I am prepared to support it as long as future regulations allow for these anomalies to be adjusted.