




Speech by

Sean Choat

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

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WEAPONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr CHOAT** (Ipswich West—LNP) (5.16 pm): I, too, rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Weapons and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. As a member of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee I am pleased to speak in support of this bill which I am sure will have a positive impact on the community. This bill represents implementation of key LNP election promises. It is pleasing to see yet another example of the Newman government getting on with the business of governing the state in line with the expectations of our community. I very firmly share the sentiments just expressed by the member for Broadwater, who is also a member of the committee. In my electorate of Ipswich West people have had it up to the back teeth with people getting slaps on the wrist and the finger pointed at them by, unfortunately, people who in my view do not have a connection with reality. People just cannot believe some of the sentences that are reported in the local papers, particularly where they relate to crimes that have been committed in the local community. I will not go into any specifics, but my office has received quite a number of calls from people saying, 'I cannot believe that that is all they got.' I think this bill will go some way to changing that and, as I said earlier, bring sentencing into line with the expectations of our wider community.

The objective of the bill is to amend the Weapons Act 1990, the Corrective Services Act 2006 and the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 to impose mandatory minimum periods of imprisonment where the offences of unlawful possession, unlawful supply and trafficking of weapons are committed in certain circumstances. The mandatory penalties imposed by the bill will apply to adults who in certain circumstances unlawfully carry on the business of trafficking in weapons, supply weapons where at least one of the weapons is a short firearm, possess a firearm where the firearm is used in the commission of an indictable offence, possess a firearm where the possession of the firearm is for the purpose of committing or facilitating an indictable offence and possess a short firearm in a public place. On that last point, I think there is a growing fear in our community, based on some of the events of recent times, that we are going to have a situation where people will be walking down the street only to be confronted by someone pulling a short firearm from under their jacket. It may sound like something out of an American crime series, but people have a legitimate fear that this is where our society is headed.

Back in April this year the honourable the Premier announced the government's intention to introduce mandatory minimum penalties for weapons offences in an effort to address the unlawful use of firearms. That announcement was made in the context of a growing concern about criminal activity involving the use of firearms, both in Queensland and across the country. Indeed, we have seen some shocking examples of firearms being used in the community and the government is doing something serious to prevent those types of incidents and to punish those responsible. Yes, this is about punishment. It goes back to the old-time view that if you do something there should—indeed, there must—be a serious consequence. In no way does this bill seek the persecution of the many upstanding members of the Queensland public who own a firearm. Its focus is on the possession and use of firearms by persons engaged in criminal activity who, more and more, pose a very real and significant risk to the safety of the community.

The bill addresses the concerns of our community and their expectation that we will be tough on crime and on criminals by ensuring that the penalties imposed meet those expectations and provide adequate deterrence against such conduct. Where an individual is convicted of an offence and a mandatory period of imprisonment applies, any date for parole, release or eligibility that is imposed under the Penalties and Sentences Act and any parole eligibility imposed under the Corrective Services Act does not fall before the expiry of the applicable mandatory minimum term of imprisonment. The bill also amends the act to ensure that both unlicensed persons in possession of firearms and licensed persons in possession of unregistered firearms may be afforded protection against prosecution when surrendering weapons in compliance with an amnesty declared under provisions of the act. The bill is certainly not intended to erode the rights of licensed firearm owners. I know this is something important to many people in my electorate and certainly across regional and rural Queensland in particular.

Additionally, the bill gives effect to the government's commitment to reduce red tape and the regulatory burden associated with time-consuming and non-essential rules, forms, regulations and procedures. I have been happy to assist a number of people in my electorate who have been left waiting to have applications processed. They are people such as collectors and other enthusiasts such as sporting shooters. The bill reduces the annoying red tape associated with legitimate firearms ownership and applications, and I know it will be most welcomed from that perspective.

Eighteen initiatives have been identified through a review of the act and subordinate legislation. Nine initiatives have been included in the bill, with a further nine to be addressed through policy and subordinate legislation. I look forward to seeing the benefits the bill will provide to our community for its safety and the reassurance it will give to the law-abiding people of Queensland whom it seeks to serve and protect. In particular, that last phrase means a lot to me because it is a recurring theme among the people who come to me to talk about their concerns. They feel that offenders are either not incarcerated at all or they are released after a very short time. In the media we see incredibly serious examples of what can happen, such as particularly unfortunate instances of people running rampant in suburban shopping centres and shooting people. I would hate to think that something such as that would ever happen in one of my quiet localities, such as Lowood or Rosewood. Certainly, it would traumatise any community. I am very interested to see the bill passed. I look forward to seeing the safety benefits it will provide to the community. I commend the bill to the House.