




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Ryan**

**MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD**

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Record of Proceedings, 11 October 2017

**MOTION: DISALLOWANCE OF STATUTORY INSTRUMENT**

 **Hon. MT RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services) (9.25 pm): I oppose the disallowance motion. Australians will never forget where they were in April 1996 when 35 people were slaughtered and 23 people were injured by a lone shooter at Port Arthur. The loss of life was staggering and tragic. It followed a number of other shootings that had stunned our nation. However, thankfully, Port Arthur was the turning point. It was a proud but bittersweet moment in Australia's history when we stood as one to say enough was enough.

To give credit where credit is due, John Howard, a Liberal Party prime minister who was by no means popular on my side of politics, showed remarkable leadership to unite and protect this nation by forging the National Firearms Agreement. That was not an easy thing to do politically for Mr Howard or the conservative state leaders who had to sell the agreement to their rural constituencies and took much political pain as a result. We have heard Rob Borbidge, a former premier of Queensland, make that very point. However, those leaders were resolute and, as a result, the National Firearms Agreement and the legislation that the states introduced stopped the mass shootings we had begun to get used to.

In the 18 years between 1979 and 1996, there were 13 fatal mass shooting incidents in Australia. Those incidents resulted in a total of 104 deaths, with at least another 52 people injured. There have been no fatal mass shooting incidents in Australia since the introduction of the National Firearms Agreement and the initial gun buyback in 1996 and 1997. I repeat: there have been no fatal mass shootings in Australia since the NFA was introduced. It was unequivocally the right thing to do. Our nation is safer and Queensland is safer. In fact, Australia's gun laws have become the gold standard internationally, cited each time a tragedy happens in the United States.

The National Firearms Agreement placed tighter controls on firearms possession. Our Weapons Act and weapons regulations are based on the National Firearms Agreement and include the underlying principles that weapon possession and use are subordinate to the need to ensure public and individual safety and that that safety is improved by imposing strict controls on the possession of firearms. The weapons category regulation categorises those weapons in line with the National Firearms Agreement. Those categories generally had regard to the potential danger posed by the weapon, with lever action shotguns classified as category A weapons.

In December 2014, the unthinkable happened. A lone gunman, a terrorist and mad man, held 18 people hostage in the Lindt cafe in Sydney's Martin Place. Two hostages died and three hostages and a police officer were injured. Again it was time to review our firearms laws. A report by the joint Commonwealth and New South Wales review into the Martin Place siege was considered by the Council of Australian Governments' Law, Crime and Community Safety Council. The report included an acknowledgement that there had been significant technological advancement and departures from the National Firearms Agreement since 1996 that should be addressed. As a result, the Law, Crime and Community Safety Council agreed to implement a number of the review's recommendations, including simplifying the regulation of the legal firearms market through an update of the technical elements of the National Firearms Agreement.

There had already been concerns articulated over the proposed importation of a large number of Adler A110 lever action shotguns with high-capacity magazines of seven rounds or more as opposed to the more commonly available three or four round shotguns. In August 2015 the Australian government banned the importation of lever action shotguns with a magazine capacity of more than five rounds based on concerns that their continued importation may undermine the public safety intent of the National Firearms Agreement.

The reclassification of lever action shotguns was subsequently incorporated into the National Firearms Agreement review. Lever action shotguns with a magazine capacity of up to five rounds will now be classified as category B weapons and those with a magazine capacity of more than five rounds will be classified as the more restricted category D weapons. On this very point, this year I met with John Howard in Sydney and discussed this matter with him. Mr Howard told me that he remains resolute about gun controls in Australia.

The Palaszczuk government will never water down our tough gun laws. In light of last week's tragedy in Las Vegas, the debate about gun control has again been reignited around the world, and it is a debate worth having. In fact, it is a debate that must be ongoing and untainted by base political motives. This issue is too important to shy away from, particularly in the aftermath of the deadliest mass shooting in United States modern history, with 58 dead and almost 500 people injured—mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and friends slaughtered by a mad lone gunman. Hundreds more were maimed and thousands more had their lives changed forever.

The Queensland government has an added responsibility to ensure the safety of everyone who lives and visits our state in the lead-up to the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games next year. Nothing must mar our reputation as a safe place to visit. The Palaszczuk government has always acknowledged that the vast majority of firearm owners in Queensland are decent, law-abiding citizens.

I established a firearms advisory forum to ensure they all had a voice at the table. It includes representatives from the firearms industry, the dealer network, the agricultural sector, sporting and recreational shooters, victims of crime groups, the police and Police Union and the Queensland Law Society. We have worked constructively with stakeholders on a range of firearm matters, including how best to implement the changes agreed by COAG. They do not all agree with all of the changes, but they are changes that must be made. Queenslanders deserve the same protections as every other Australian, as we agreed at COAG. Our community and our police need to know they are protected by the toughest firearm laws possible and that their government will stand up for them and not allow any weakening of those laws. Allowing one crack to appear in the armour we have created with our laws will weaken our entire shield. It may also lead to more and more deviations from the National Firearm Agreement and the protections that it affords.

I will not apologise and I will not, unlike the LNP, retreat under the pressure. Under the Palaszczuk government Queensland will remain part of John Howard's National Firearms Agreement. I am surprised and wary to hear the LNP will support the Labor government on this issue. I surprised because both the LNP leader and his police spokesman have been touring Queensland's regions in recent months saying quite the opposite. Unfortunately it appears the LNP members are saying one thing in front of the cameras here in Brisbane and another thing completely different out there in apparent fear of the threat of One Nation. Earlier today—

**Mr Cripps** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Member for Hinchinbrook, I would urge you to make your interjections relevant.

**Mr RYAN:** Earlier today the Leader of the Opposition said—

We support John Howard's gun laws. We believe that they provide the appropriate level of security. We put community safety and security at the forefront of our considerations and we support those laws that were brought in in 1996 and we won't be supporting the disallowance motion.

Yet his police spokesman, the member for Everton, has been saying something quite different to gun lobbyists. Earlier this year the member for Everton told the Shooters Union Australia that this reclassification that we are considering tonight had nothing to do with the Lindt cafe incident and refusing to reclassify lever action shotguns would not undermine the National Firearms Agreement. In fact, he went on to add that this particular reclassification was an attack on the integrity of Queensland shooters and their rights to have firearms.

It appears that we have a case of good cop, bad cop on the LNP side, but it is mostly bad cop. The LNP's recently released firearms election policy goes on to further water down aspects of our strong gun laws—for example, by removing the genuine reasons criteria for reapplications for category H concealable handguns for rural use. Worryingly, nowhere in the LNP's election policy do they mention a commitment to John Howard's National Firearms Agreement. In fact, they do not mention it at all.

I also found it interesting that their policy is called fairer gun laws. Why would they not say safer gun laws or tighter gun laws? Could the LNP perhaps explain who their gun laws will be fairer to? Could it be Ron Owen from Gympie because the member for Everton has admitted that he has been talking with the president of the Firearm Owners Association of Australia who, just last week, just days after the Las Vegas shooting massacre, had the gross insensitivity to describe all gun laws as irrelevant and demand the unregulated ownership of firearms. In that interview that the member for Everton did with the Shooters Union Australia he mentions how he drops into Ron Owen's place when he is in Gympie to consult with him and also mentions how he is now more informed on gun laws. The Shooters Union Australia is an international affiliate of the US pro-gun lobby, the National Rifle Association, and has the stated aim of stopping the National Firearms Agreement.

Perhaps even more alarmingly the member for Everton has repeated his attack on the Queensland Police Service's Weapons Licensing Branch. He has told the Shooters Union that the Queensland Police Service's Weapons Licensing Branch was dictating policy by refusing some applicants licences and that any minister who allowed that to happen was gutless. He said a police minister was obligated to intervene and order police to stop interfering with a person's right to own firearms. I make no apology for taking advice from those on the front line—those who have the most experience and who are impacted the most by weapons legislation, our brave police.

The offensive attack on our police by the member for Everton is not new. He has made numerous allegations against the Weapons Licensing Branch and has even accused them of not complying with the law. In their just released policy, the LNP state that they would stop the Weapons Licensing Branch from rejecting applications for licences. 'The current approach by the Weapons Licensing Branch has provided great uncertainty and needs to change,' the policy says.

Last month the member for Everton also told *Queensland Country Life* that a Tim Nicholls led government would be ordering the Weapons Licensing Branch to toe the line. 'The government can't abrogate its responsibility to public servants, which is what Labor has done,' the member for Everton has said.

People who have had their licence renewal refused will be able to reapply under the new policy they say. In other words, a Nicholls led LNP government will order the Queensland Police Service's Weapons Licensing Branch to issue licences to people who have previously been rejected. They will be telling our police how to do their job. Operational decisions should always be made by the police in accordance with law, not by politicians. The Liberal National Party have made no secret of their opportunistic plan to grab votes by watering down our tough gun laws. In April this year, amid a worrying outbreak of gun violence on the Gold Coast, a gaggle of local LNP MPs joined pro-gun lobbyists at a Gold Coast shooting range to open fire on John Howard's firearms laws. The *Gold Coast Bulletin* reported that the Shooters Union Australia and joint host, the Shooting Industry Foundation of Australia, used the event as a platform to criticise existing gun laws.

What we see time and time again from this LNP opposition is a persistence to mix policing with politics. It got them into trouble in the dark old days of the Bjelke-Petersen era and it will get them back in trouble again. They have learned nothing from the past. The Leader of the Opposition now has to come clean. Is he weakening our gun laws as part of a preference deal he has done with One Nation or is holding on to the leadership of the LNP—

**Mr DICKSON:** Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I do not think One Nation has too much to do with the debate, and we are still waiting for the minister to answer the question: how many people have been shot by Adlers since June 2015?

**Mr SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Mr RYAN:** The Leader of the Opposition now has to come clean. Is he weakening our gun laws as part of a preference deal he has done with One Nation or is holding on to the leadership of the LNP so important that he is willing to betray his constituents in Clayfield and around Queensland who will no doubt be appalled by any weakening of our gun laws?

Our government stands for strong gun controls. Our government will not step back from the National Firearms Agreement. We oppose the disallowance motion and we support keeping Queenslanders safe through a robust, responsible, strong gun control regime here in Queensland.