




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (6.03 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Corrective Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would first like to address the matter of clause 15, the seven-day early release possibility for inmates. I heard the minister remarking that amendments concerning this would be moved. I think it is vital that we do mention this provision was included in the bill. The very fact that the government was contemplating this move is entirely consistent with their prioritisation of the rights and interests of offenders, inmates and criminals over those of victims and of a society that expects something to be done about the rampant crime in our midst. The idea that a bureaucrat rather than a judge should be able to vary the sentence of an inmate to allow them to leave up to seven days prior to the completion of their sentence is entirely out of step with the thinking of reasonable, everyday Queenslanders.

When I mentioned this provision of the bill to some of my constituents I was greeted with horror. It was universally condemned. I cannot understand why the government would persist with this kind of hand-wringing over criminals rather than over those who are victims of crime, those whose communities are suffering from crime and those whose economic interests, families and safety are compromised by the crime in our midst. It sends the wrong signal that a government would prioritise in a legislative instrument like this bill the early release of offenders when people in places like Townsville, Cairns and my own electorate of Southern Downs are complaining about crime. I believe the perception of members of my community is that not enough is being done and that there are lots of bleeding hearts out there who concern themselves with the welfare and rights of those going before the courts and those perpetrating crimes against them, but there is only lip-service at best for those who are victims of those crimes.

For example, in Goondiwindi one of the difficulties is that petty crime and car theft is rampant on the streets at times. The offenders steal cars and then roll them into the Macintyre River. I think we could forgive the good folk of places like Goondiwindi, Townsville and Cairns for being more concerned about their interests, their hard-earned possessions and property, the safety of their communities and their families than the plight of inmates who may be released from jail up to seven days early so they can catch the right flight home. I think that was the pretext that we were given.

I would like to also say that clause 62, which deals with gel blasters, is another amazing and unfathomable move by this government. If I recall correctly, earlier on we heard the minister talking about how this was a move that was good for community safety, for users and for small business. Nothing could be further from the truth. If we talk about community safety, there are already laws on the statute books which enable police to deal with people who brandish replica firearms or go about armed in order to cause menace or alarm people. I have spoken to local police in my neck of the woods and none of them have been lying awake at night biting their fingernails worrying about the progress of reform in the area of gel blasters.

In terms of the users, my sons have gel blasters. We live on a farm property to the east of Stanthorpe. They have some gel blasters and I really enjoy using those gel blasters to play with them. I am not home that often. I spend a lot of my time on the road. I am usually in a motel in Millmerran,

Allora or Goondiwindi most nights of the week. When I get home the idea that we can run around the backyard, hide behind some trees and shoot each other with gel balls is wonderful because it gives expression to what I would sometimes like to do in this House.

Mr Langbroek interjected.

Mr LISTER: I take the interjection from my honourable friend the member for Surfers Paradise. Yes, my wife, Belinda, is a better shot than I am. As a family we enjoy using them. The use of gel blasters is an entirely innocuous pastime. Earlier on I spoke to one of my sons on the phone and I told him that this bill was coming up. I finally disclosed to him—I had been putting it off because I did not want to upset him—that the Labor government may take his gel blasters off him. That is what this amounts to. Honourable members should see a nine-year-old boy who has been told that he is going to be deprived of some of his favourite possessions because of the whimsy and capriciousness of this rump of a government.

We have no gel blaster club in Stanthorpe. I speak for many people in my electorate who are too far away from a gel blaster club—if one exists at all—to be able to fulfil the requirements under this bill that they be a member of a gel blaster club in order to retain possession of them. This is madness; it is overreach. It is a thought bubble which has clearly not been dreamt up by the police force. However, I would not put them on the spot and ask them if this was a police proposal rather than a ministerial one. It is clearly not going to do anything for community safety. It is hurting users.

The last thing that the minister mentioned was small business. We have a gel blaster shop in Warwick and I was speaking to the proprietor of that shop. He is working hard in a retail business that he started himself trying to make a living for his family. He is trying to pay taxes to pay for politicians and for all of the welfare and health services, police officers and teachers that we oversee in this House. I do not know how the minister could possibly believe that this move to outlaw gel blasters is in any way consistent with the interests of small business. In saying that, I know I speak for the operator of that business in my electorate.

If we return to the community safety matter, is it not instructive that there is a bill upon the table of this House that was introduced a long time ago proposing to deal with violent criminals and their unlawful use of firearms? That bill has not seen the light of day since it was considered by the committee. If the government were truly interested in community safety, that bill would be up for its second reading debate. Instead, we are talking about toys. We are talking about depriving my nine-year-old son, his six-year-old brother—I think he is yet to find out about this—and hundreds of thousands of other Queenslanders and Australians like them of their gel blasters.

Lastly, the Queensland Living History Federation made a very thorough and commendable submission on this bill in the committee process. It was very interesting to see that in 2012 it was granted a five-year exemption from having to have normal licensing arrangements for its replica firearms, its innocuous firearms and the ones that fire a puff of smoke and a bunch of paper for re-enactments and so forth. The Queensland Living History Federation do a great deal of good in the community to keep alive the traditions and stories of our history. It irritates me to see that they as well have been caught up in this net; this fetishist obsession with clamping down on gun owners, as we saw when gun shops were closed on a whim. What exactly did that achieve during the COVID lockdown? They have said, 'If we cannot have another five-year exemption, could we just have a special licence category?' The Queensland Living History Federation's submission states—

Our request that a new class of licence for re-enactors be created to specifically address our activities has been rejected, on the stated basis that it is too difficult to amend the Act.

This government makes an art form of amending acts! How many amendments were moved to the prior bill? I have heard legendary stories about 200 amendments in one sitting to a bill for which the current education minister was responsible. Was that the racing one? If that is the sort of insulting rebuff that a great institution like the Queensland Living History Federation gets from this government when it comes up with a sensible proposal, what hope do any of us have?

The bill also contains a number of good measures which we will support, but the LNP will oppose clauses 15 and 62. In summing up, this government has its priorities all wrong. The people in my electorate of Southern Downs are aghast to see how this government prioritises nitpicking around gel blasters when we have rampant crime on our streets and nothing is being done about that.