




Speech By
Hon. Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES (MAKING JACK'S LAW PERMANENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; CORRECTIVE SERVICES (PAROLE BOARD) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. DR LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Minister for Manufacturing and Minister for Regional and Rural Development) (7.48 pm): I rise to speak to the cognate of the Police Powers and Responsibilities (Making Jack's Law Permanent) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and the Corrective Services (Parole Board) Amendment Bill 2025. As so often happens in this place, we see legislation brought before the House as a consequence of tragedy out in our communities. The tragic loss of Jack Beasley is certainly no different. There has been a lot of discussion around the laws relating to Jack's Law, the evidentiary tests that were required, the police officers and the shortcomings about how the framework was difficult, complex and onerous. We needed to make it simpler, much easier for our police officers but at the same time make our communities a safer place.

If you look at the statistics between April 2023 and May 2025: 1,124 weapons were seized with 115,334 persons being wanded by senior police officers—startling figures—but of more concern, over 3,000 people were charged as a result of operations. Some 3,000 people were unlawfully possessing a weapon in our public places. The number of offences involving knives in a public place which is not a 'relevant place' under that legislation have only increased.

We know from talking to police officers that there are inefficient procedures and administrative arrangements that do not advance the fight against knife crime; if anything, it prevents our police officers from doing their jobs. Those notification and reporting requirements on police officers are a significant burden on their already overstretched resources. This bill before the House appropriately balances community safety and civil liberties. It prioritises the rights of victims over the rights of offenders—as they should be. It makes Jack's Law permanent by removing the sunset clause that schedules its expiry on 30 October 2026. I vividly recall when I was on that side of the House arguing about that sunset clause and moving amendments to have that sunset clause removed. Those opposite were adamant that it needed to stay in place. So for them to stand up in the course of this debate and somehow try and twist that around is erroneous on their part. It allows a police officer to use a handheld scanner in a relevant place without the need to obtain an authority to do so from a senior police officer. It expands the application of Jack's Law to include public places that are not 'relevant places' by allowing police officers to use a handheld scanner in these areas, provided they first obtain authority to do so from a senior police officer. It simplifies the notification reporting framework, which is what we need to do to assist our police officers, and it improves policing efficiencies by streamlining the legislative framework underlying Jack's Law.

Clause 10 of the bill introduces new section 39BA to allow a police officer to use a handheld scanner without a warrant in relevant places without requiring an authorisation from a senior officer. We need to trust our police officers. They have enormous powers. They undergo strenuous training. They are subject to significant compliance and we need to trust them to do the job that they are sworn in to

do. A senior officer may issue an authority in relation to a public place only if the senior officer considers the use of a handheld scanner is effective to detect or deter the commission of an offence involving the possession or use of a knife or other weapon. In order to satisfy this criteria, the factors that may be considered by that senior officer include, for example: criminal intelligence that may have been received in relation to the public place; the concentration of licensed premises in the area; whether there is an elevated concentration of people in the area due to an event; and if the use of handheld scanners has previously been authorised and whether the use of handheld scanner identifies persons carrying knives or other weapons. This expansion will enhance community safety and provide our police with proactive policing powers to address violent crime involving knives. It is what our community wants, it is what they expect and tonight we are giving them that authority. As an additional safeguard, as I said before, all police officers acting under Jack's Law must complete specific training on the framework prior to conducting handheld scanning exercises. So we know, and we can have confidence, that those officers who are exercising those powers have been appropriately trained.

In respect of the proposed machete ban from those opposite, as has already been pointed out, in Queensland it is already illegal to carry a knife—including a machete—in a public place. Two weeks ago in the Burdekin we had the Australian Hand Cane Cutting Championships. There would have been 100 cane knives because that is what they are called—they are not called machetes, they are called 'cane knives'. You would not go to a canefarmer's shed in this state and not find half a dozen cane knives.

Mr MINNIKIN: I have got one!

Mr LAST: I take that interjection, the member for Chatsworth has a cane knife. Anyone who is fair dinkum about gardening has a cane knife. If you want some lessons, go and see the member for Chatsworth! It just goes to show we need to get this right, we need to get the balance right. These cane knives are a part of our history in this state. They are a part of our history in the sugar industry. I, for one, certainly support our canefarmers retaining possession of their cane knives.

If I can move on to the Corrective Services (Parole Board) Amendment Bill 2025, as a former Parole Board member, I am all too aware of the difficulties of that job and the responsibilities that sit on the shoulder of members. Again those opposite did little—if anything—to address those difficulties. Back in 2021 we saw a crisis in the parole system that meant those opposite needed to extend parole consideration times due to 'unprecedented demand' at a cost of almost \$4 million per month. Then last year, we saw another crisis when we witnessed the member for Pine River's infamous memory lapse. Despite telling the estimates hearing that she could not recall details, the member did confirm that she discussed the functioning of, and her confidence in, the Parole Board. While it is the responsibility of others to investigate the departure of the former president of the Parole Board it is clear that, under those opposite, serious concerns remained.

The need for the amendments contained in this bill is obvious and that need was illustrated back in 2016 when Walter Sofronoff KC reviewed the system at the request of the then premier. In his final report dated 30 November 2016, Mr Sofronoff referred to 'an inconsistency in approach to deciding applications' as well as board members not always having adequate information available and to board members not having 'a consistent view as to the acceptable level of risk for a grant of parole'. Given the explicit effect that the granting of parole can have on the community and victims of crime, any reasonable person would expect government to respond, and respond they did. In typical Labor fashion, those opposite introduced an explicit safeguard for offenders. That is right: if a parolee is returned to custody due to the decision of a single prescribed board member, the decision must be reviewed. Conversely, if a single prescribed member grants parole there is no review. Yet again, those opposite put the rights of the offender ahead of the rights of victims and ahead of community safety.

No-one is saying that decisions made by Parole Board members are manifestly wrong but when you look at the concerns raised by Mr Sofronoff and overlay that with the undeniable need for a safe community, surely oversight is justified. Furthermore, when it comes to community safety we must do our utmost to reduce the chance for human error and to ensure consistency in the process. Instead of acknowledging the undeniable rights of victims to feel safe, those opposite are cherry-picking words from a statement of a man with more than 25 years experience as a barrister who spent almost four years as the parliamentary crime and corruption commissioner. The message to those opposite is simple: we are fixing your mistakes yet again. Queenslanders have had enough of your petty attempts to contradict legal advice and respected legal practitioners. Your choice as to how you vote in this bill is simple. Learn from your mistakes. Support your community's safety by supporting this bill or alternatively, continue your soft-on-crime approach from the opposition benches.