

FIREARMS AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Page: 9511

Agreement in Principle

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [4.19 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The amendments in the Firearms Amendment Bill 2008, which was introduced in the other place by the Shooters Party, propose a number of changes to the Firearms Act 1996 and the Firearms Regulation 2006. I congratulate the Hon. Roy Smith and the Hon. Robert Brown on introducing this good piece of legislation. More than 20,000 licensed shooters are registered in the electorate of Tamworth, of which over 6,000 have been licensed since 1996. Many of these people are members of the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia [SSAA], which has increased its base in New South Wales from 35,000 in 1996 to over 50,000 today.

The proposed amendments to the Act and regulations are designed to improve the operation of the system for the legal use and registration of firearms by law-abiding citizens such as those I have mentioned. The amendments aim to remove some of the impediments to legitimate sport shooting, hunting and collecting. Extensive consultation with police, the Firearms Registry and accredited sport shooting, hunting and collecting clubs has led to the developments of the amendments, which I stress will have no impact at all on public safety. As these amendments were first introduced in the other place, a *Hansard* record exists of their detail; however, I take the opportunity to broadly outline their intentions.

The bill proposes an exemption from the need to register antique firearms manufactured before 1900, and allows for possession of certain such firearms without a licence or permit. The exemption from registration applies only to pre-1900 firearms that do not take breech-loaded metallic cartridges, or are firearms for which ammunition is not commercially available. The exemption from licence applies only to long arms of the type described above, and prepercussion pistols. It extends a temporary amnesty that already exists in the regulations for highly prized collectors' items that are all now more than 108 years old. It does not allow for any such firearm to be fired. The amendments will remove the 28-day waiting period that applies to the issuing of a permit to acquire for a firearm, but only when the applicant already has a firearm of that type registered under his or her name. Licence holders will still be required to obtain a permit to acquire for every other firearm they wish to purchase. The amendment removes the mandatory waiting period only for an applicant who already owns a firearm of the same category.

Current legislation prohibits the possession of category C firearms, except under special circumstances such as for members of clay target shooting clubs affiliated with the Australian Clay Target Association. The amendments will allow members of clubs affiliated with other target shooting bodies that have been approved by the Commissioner of Police also to be able to apply for a special category C licence. This will permit the person to use a self-loading or pump-action shotgun only in a recognised clay target shooting competition, and only where they can demonstrate a special need for this exemption. At present people wishing to try shooting as a sport may only do so if they first join a club and then obtain a temporary exemption through the Firearms Registry. Such exemptions apply for a maximum of three months. The amendments will enable unlicensed persons to shoot under supervision at approved ranges without these restrictions. Such persons will have to make a written declaration that they have committed no offences that would make them ineligible for the issue of a licence under the Act. They will be able to shoot only under supervision of a licensed adult, and they cannot purchase or take a firearm or ammunition home.

The bill provides police with the option of dealing with minor offences under the Act and regulations by way of penalty notices. Penalty notices will not be issued for indictable offences. Currently even minor technical breaches can result in a licence holder being unable to renew their licence. The proposals mean that a penalty notice will not disqualify a person from having a licence or permit unless they elect to contest the matter in court and the court then finds them guilty. This is designed to give police more discretion in dealing with minor breaches. Changes to the type of authority under which a theatrical armourer operates are designed to expedite the way in which they can meet customer requirements. It is proposed to change the way in which they operate from a permit to a type of dealer's licence that will allow them to meet their client's needs quickly. Bill Caley is secretary of the Tamworth Pistol Club and President of the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, Peel Valley Branch. This branch has some 240 members, and the Tamworth Pistol Club has approximately 190 members. Bill stated to me:

The changes to legislation will have absolutely no impact whatsoever on public safety. We are appalled by the

Government's failure to prosecute illegal and criminal usage of firearms while making it very tough for licensed and registered firearms users to pursue their sport. We are totally against persons carrying firearms for personal protection. If kids over the age of twelve are taught firearms safety on licensed ranges they will have a greater respect for community safety and respect for the usage of firearms.

Bill has well summed up the feelings of thousands of accountable people who enjoy the use of firearms for sport and recreation. Those people are sick and tired of feeling like criminals rather than the responsible members of the community they are. Peter Holmes, President of the Tamworth Clay Target Club, who is also a club coach and Firearms Safety Awareness Officer, also applauded the introduction of these amendments in the other place by saying:

This is a small step towards common sense in a difficult and often emotional area. These amendments will bring New South Wales a little closer to laws in other States.

John Taylor is a member of the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia Tamworth Branch and the Northwest Hunting Club, and he is an accredited safety awareness officer with a restricted Game Council licence for State Forests. John has been shooting for nearly 40 years. He pointed out the well-organised nature of sporting and recreational shooting in the Tamworth district, with events held every weekend between clubs. These events have resulted in a marked increase in junior membership and many family groups participating. John told me:

We've been finding the young people want to get a licence and their families come along and they become involved.

The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia runs a complete junior shooting program. It has recently introduced a magazine called *The Junior Shooter*, as well as its monthly magazine *Australian Shooter*. John said:

These changes will not affect the safety of anyone at all. It will only benefit law-abiding citizens who wish to enjoy their chosen sport. It's better to have people involved with our organisations to pursue their chosen sport, as it develops respect and responsibility in handling firearms. Even when we test new candidates for a licence, it's not like a car where you're on your own, we help and supervise them until they are not only fully proficient, but confident in themselves as well.

John referred to many of the wider community events that shooters groups support. They run supervised youth camps at the range at Tilterweira, near Wanaaring; they work with the Department of Primary Industries on fox surveys, and they support organisations such as the Childflight helicopter service. He pointed out also that the shooters movement has people such as Lee Kernaghan, Todd Russell, Glen McGrath and Shannon Noll as responsible role models. Other organisations within or catering for the Tamworth electorate include the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia Tamworth Branch, Tamworth and Peel Valley Rifle Club, Boggabri-Gunnedah Rifle Club, Gunnedah Pistol Club, Moonbi Ranges Clay Target Club, Manilla Pistol Club, Barraba Civilian and Military Rifle Club, Peel Valley Rifle Club, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia Gunnedah, Gunnedah Western Action, Gunnedah Gun Club and Quirindi Sporting Clays.

At the 2006 Commonwealth Games Australia won nine gold, eight silver and six bronze medals in various shooting events. These are fantastic results and can be attributed to the encouragement of the clubs I have mentioned. It should not be so difficult to develop such young talent to a competitive level. These amendments seek to encourage good results into the future. With the introduction of these amendments, I am going in to bat for responsible people. The amendments do not reduce public safety; however, they will remove anomalies and bring New South Wales more into line with procedures in other States by allowing people to try sport shooting. Sporting shooters and hunters are the most legislated, restricted and inspected citizens in our State. Licensed firearm owners are subject to more scrutiny than anyone else in Australia in pursuing their chosen sport. The amendments do not seek to dilute laws designed to protect the general community but are designed to encourage sport and competition, to develop talent at a reasonable age and to ease restrictions on specialists within the field. The bill facilitates this in a very responsible manner. I commend the bill to the House.