



Speech by


**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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## **WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (12.25 pm): I rise to join the debate on the Weapons Amendment Bill 2011, introduced into the House on 12 May by the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services, the honourable member for Nudgee. This bill proposes amendments to the Weapons Act 1990, the Weapons Categories Regulation 1997 and the Weapons Regulation 1996 with minor or consequential amendments to the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989, the Explosive Regulations 2003, the Security Providers Act 1993 and the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act 1994.

The Weapons Amendment Bill 2011 has been introduced following a lengthy review process initiated by the Beattie government in 2006. Not surprisingly, this topic has attracted a high amount of interest from the public, particularly the many recreational shooters across our state. It is worth mentioning that these members of the public generally operate weapons in a correct and disciplined manner. They respect and understand the use of weapons while minimising the danger to others.

The minister mentioned in his second reading speech that over 2,500 online comments and submissions were received in response to the draft consultation legislation circulated by the government from 4 August to 14 September 2010. Having seen a large majority of these submissions come through my office, as many members in this House would relate, there was an overwhelming level of opposition to the proposed changes—changes that were considered to be highly onerous on law-abiding shooters and offering little in the way of increasing public safety as they were purported to do. As a result of the numerous issues arising from the public consultation process, the minister advised that this bill will contain the first stage of the review amendments while the second tranche, to be introduced at a later date, will focus on the more contentious policy issues such as the regulation of imitation weapons.

In what is becoming typical behaviour from this tired, toxic Bligh Labor government, it would appear that yet again it has been forced to back down on its unpopular direction following the backlash from the very vocal gun lobby. As it stands, no-one has any idea what this second tranche of laws will contain or whether or not they will do anything to reduce weapons related crime in Queensland. It will be interesting to see the response from the public when the second stage of the weapons review legislation is introduced through the new parliamentary committee system where open and transparent debate and consultation can take place.

As honourable members have heard from the shadow minister, the honourable member for Surfers Paradise, the LNP will not be opposing this bill. However, we hold strong reservations about the Bligh government's inaction and inability to reign in dangerous crime involving guns and knives. Under Labor's countless years of soft attitude to crime and the introduction of legislation with inadequate sentencing for convicted criminals, crime levels have been permitted to spiral out of control. According to the minister, the Weapons Amendment Bill 2011 aims to further enhance community safety and sends a strong message of deterrence to would-be offenders. But, I am sorry to say, it fails to address the serious issue of illegal firearms. A large number of clauses would amend existing offence provisions in the Weapons Act and weapons regulation, largely by doubling the maximum penalty for offences. The LNP welcomes moves to combat illegal firearms, but some of these penalty increases contained in this bill are grossly unfair.

As I stated earlier, there was an overwhelming negative response to the draft legislation circulated in 2010. The main cause of public outrage was the proposed increased cost of compliance, licensing and registration for law-abiding licensed shooters as well as the added burden of storage and locking requirements for weapons and, similarly, for replica weapons.

Also of concern with the draft proposal was the requirement for members of shooting clubs to have compulsory affiliation with one or more shooters associations in Queensland. Law-abiding shooters expressed their complete outrage at this suggestion and the additional cost to be imposed on them, the inability to police such a requirement and the fact that in no way would it contribute to the overarching objective of increasing community safety.

Provisions in this bill expand the current definition of bladed weapons, including more types of knives under category M weapons, as well as accessories used to conceal knives, in line with national standards. However, as with any legislation introduced by this out-of-touch government, it has to be asked whether it will have any impact on the levels of dangerous activity involving knives or whether this soft-on-crime Bligh government will again fail to deliver legislation with any teeth and the penalties needed to deter these cowardly offenders.

Honourable members would be aware of the spate of armed robberies that plagued the city of the Gold Coast in the first half of this year, many involving knives as the primary weapon. At the height of the epidemic in June, some 82 armed robberies had occurred since the start of the year—an average of one robbery every 1.82 days. A breakdown of figures provided in a recent question on notice asked by my colleague the honourable member for Gaven for the period from 1 January to 12 June shows that nine out of 13 armed robberies reported to the Palm Beach Police Station were hits on retail businesses. Armed robberies can have devastating effects on small businesses and their staff. Businesses in my electorate of Currumbin were not spared from these terrifying ordeals. I can only begin to imagine the intense fear experienced by innocent victims in armed robberies and the ongoing post-attack anxieties, nightmares and insecurities.

I attended the first armed robbery awareness symposium run by the Queensland Police Service in conjunction with the Gold Coast Police District Crime Prevention Unit held in Currumbin in July. Unfortunately, a relatively low turnout really highlighted the dire situation facing our small business sector, many of them micro businesses, with business owners and managers unable to spare the time or the resources to attend and hear vital tips on protecting their own businesses.

A wave of armed robberies that were reported across Australia and beyond had the potential to damage our reputation as a safe tourist destination. The Bligh government sat on its hands while this spate of frightening crimes wreaked havoc through our Gold Coast suburbs, and only when the public pressure and media hounded them did they allocate more police resources. And guess what? The robberies stopped.

A common response in the many submissions received through my office was that gun crimes such as those I have just mentioned are not committed by licensed shooters and, furthermore, the already strict regulations they must comply with make legal shooting a relatively safe sport and pastime. Despite the minister's sentiment in his second reading speech, nowhere in the stated purposes of this bill does it say that gun-toting criminals are the target for these reforms.

One submission from a concerned Queenslanders stated in relation to the draft legislation—

One would believe that it is the people that shoot lawfully that are the criminals in this instance.

He further mocked the government's intentions, stating—

A better course of action may be to ask the criminals to register their firearms and to keep them locked safely away. Surely if this were a successful tactic then gun crime may be reduced.

While tongue in cheek, this comment goes straight to the heart of the issues surrounding this controversial debate. Consider these facts: the number of unregistered firearms in Queensland that came into police possession for 2006, 2007 and 2008 were 3,231, 3202 and 2,727 respectively, yet the number of persons charged with possession of an unregistered firearm in these years was only 760, 634 and 545 respectively. Mike O'Connor commented in the *Courier-Mail* on 6 June 2011—

What the wave of gun-related crime that has swept through the Gold Coast in recent months has made plain, however, is that criminals have absolutely no trouble getting their hands on a firearm.

We have some of the toughest gun ownership laws in the world but the only people they prevent from owning them are those who have no intention of using them to commit crimes.

**Mr O'Brien** interjected.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** A number of incidents occurred in my electorate at the height of the crime spree, including an armed hold-up at a corner store—

**Mr O'Brien** interjected.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I would appreciate the member not interjecting while I talk about a very traumatic incident in my electorate. A number of incidents occurred in my electorate at the height of the crime spree, including an armed hold-up at a corner store on Galleon Way—

**Mr O'Brien** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is obviously no sympathy from the member for Cook for the people in my electorate. There was an armed hold-up at a corner store on Galleon Way in Currumbin Waters and an attempted armed robbery at Sticky Buns bakery in Tugun—a well-known, popular local business where the owner and baker literally took matters into his own hands, scaring off the knife-wielding thieves with some much bigger bakers knives of his own. If anyone remembers *Crocodile Dundee*, then they will know what I mean. Whilst the actions of this owner are not recommended, one can hardly blame him for protecting his hard-earned money from cowardly opportunists like these. Then there was the robbery at the Kirra Sports Club, one of the initial eight crimes to be investigated by Task Force Resolve, the special major crime squad the Bligh government was dragged kicking and screaming to initiate. The government finally yielded to the continuous public pressure from the Gold Coast community who had pleaded for the state government to do their job and step up to the plate to protect our streets.

But where do we see any genuine effort from the Bligh government to support our dedicated police force who face growing dangers as criminals run amok? The shooting death of Detective Senior Constable Damian Leeding finally shook this government into some action. On many occasions during the past 7½ years that I have been a member of the Queensland parliament I have commended our police officers for their bravery and commitment to defeating crime and keeping our community safe. Today is no different, and I once again wish to place on record my appreciation for the incredibly tough work and inhospitable hours they put in to protect us.

I will also take this opportunity to highlight a particular area of concern, the increasing aggression and violence against Queensland ambulance officers while they perform their daily duties of saving lives and caring for those in distress. The Department of Community Safety's own figures reveal assaults on paramedics have climbed from 107 in 2008-09 to 229 in 2010-11. How is it that people in one of Queensland's most trusted professions increasingly have to question their safety each time they enter a scene?

An ambulance spokesperson has advised that, while it has always been the case that ambulance officers use a common-sense, safety-first approach as some scenes have the potential to be dangerous, it has now become increasingly commonplace for ambulance officers to be unable to enter particular scenes or locations without first waiting for Queensland police officers to provide an escort due to persons at these scenes having a previous history of aggression against ambulance and police officers, particularly when they are known to the Queensland Police Service for possession of weapons. These types of people are not limited to adult males. They also include women and children, with some as young as 12 years old, as was the case only recently on the Gold Coast. Delays to access injured or ill individuals can be extensive, sometimes for hours, which can critically compromise patient care and are potentially fatal in some cases.

Ambulance delays due to potential violence against these officers have previously been reported in the media. In fact, the United Voice, formerly the LHMU, Labor's own union that represents ambulance officers industrially, has for years been calling for tougher penalties against violent offenders who assault Queensland ambulance officers. While there have been some wins for our ambulance officers through self-defence and situational awareness training, to date the constant calls from the LNP and the union movement for tougher penalties against violent offenders seem to have fallen on deaf ears. As honourable members have heard from the shadow minister, the honourable member for Surfers Paradise, the LNP believes that the state government should focus on overhauling sections of the Penalties and Sentences Act so that tougher laws are directed at actual criminals. Instead, the government will send the Queensland Weapons Licensing Branch chasing after performing arts groups and replica firearms owners instead of tracking down the thousands of illegal firearms used in crimes.