FIREARMS BILL 2024

Consideration in Detail

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

Clause 300: Approval of storage places by Commissioner —

Debate was interrupted after the clause had been partly considered.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 301 put and passed.

Clause 302: Firearm or related thing in transit —

Mr R.S. LOVE: This clause states —

For the purposes of this Part, a firearm or related thing is *in transit* whenever it is not at an approved storage place for the firearm or related thing.

A firearm could be in the hands of a commercial carrier or the postal service, or it could be in a vehicle with the owner of the firearm. Is that what we are talking about here?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The relevance for the types of situations that the Leader of the Opposition is referring to will come up in later clauses. If he wants to address them then, it might be better. This clause states —

For the purposes of this Part, a firearm or related thing is *in transit* ...

Subsequent clauses go into the detail of the different types of transit.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think clause 313 covers commercial transport. Does this clause also refer to people taking their firearm from one property to another?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 303: General duty of safekeeping of firearms and related things —

Mr R.S. LOVE: This clause talks about the general duty of the safekeeping of firearms and related things. If we look at the situation in which a vehicle is involved, it will be taken on board. In the day-to-day use of a firearm by, say, a primary producer, they will take the firearm from where it was stored in compliant storage in a shed or their house and have it with them through the day, presumably with a vehicle. Can the minister give me an idea of what the expectation of police will be around the security of a firearm if I were to leave it in the ute and hop in the tractor and drive around the paddock for an hour feeding cattle or something like that? What will be reasonable in those circumstances? Is there a build-up of case law under the previous legislation that will point to that or will it be prescribed in the regulations? I want to get an idea about that.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am informed that the situation the member has referred to in which a firearm is moved around in a vehicle, for instance, is covered by clauses 305 and 306. Clause 304 is the safekeeping clause and not relevant to moving a firearm around in a vehicle. I can address that concern under clauses 305 and 306.

Ms L. METTAM: What is meant by "take all reasonable precautions" when it comes to the safekeeping of a firearm?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am informed that it is currently the case that a person should use the best available location to ensure safekeeping of the firearm, given the circumstances. That is currently the expectation.

Ms L. METTAM: When it comes to taking reasonable precautions and the storage units themselves, has any consideration been given to the grandfathering of these clauses? It was something that was raised with me regarding the transition to the new regulations. When it comes to what is reasonable, will that take into account the transition to what will be set out by the new regulations?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am informed that clause 303 refers to the general obligations around keeping a firearm safe. Clause 304 refers to the obligations with respect to storage. That would be an appropriate point at which to talk about what the member has raised. The subsequent clauses talk about vehicles moving around, which the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk on.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 304: Storage in compliant storage —

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think the member for Vasse also wanted to ask questions on this clause. I asked this question the other day—yesterday perhaps. It related to the fact that there are cabinets that are now deemed to be compliant

and have been approved as storage units under the current law. Having been through that process myself recently, I know how that works.

Mr P. Papalia: Did you buy a Bunnings one?

Mr R.S. LOVE: No. Actually, I shifted an old one. I was too stingy to buy a new one.

The fact is that I had to send a picture of it with a little thing on it that said it was police approved. It was pretty old. What will happen to some of those containers under the laws that will come into effect? If they are compliant now, will they be grandfathered or will there be a time that people have to replace those units with a different storage unit?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I think I have stated this publicly. The intention will be to grandfather some storage units. In all likelihood, it will be the ones that are currently used to store small numbers of firearms. We will confront the challenge as storage obligations increase and requirements are enhanced. We will want to do that in a structured fashion anyway. We would not want everyone to feel compelled to seek storage that may not be available, for instance. I understand that other jurisdictions confronted that challenge. I think Victoria had issues when it raised its standards.

That aside, we have indicated that there will be grandfathering for those who hold a small number of firearms. The requirements around storage will become more demanding subject to the number and type of firearms people have—if they have larger numbers and more attractive or potentially dangerous firearms.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What did the minister mean when he said "small numbers"? The numbers will be small anyway because people will be able to own only five firearms on a hunting licence, or 10 in competition.

Mr P. Papalia: That's not small.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the minister talking about five firearms being small or one? What are we talking about?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Those deliberations are still underway. They will be done in consultation with interested parties and peak bodies. They have not yet arrived at the number—the upper limit for grandfathering.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That process will be of interest to people when it happens. How will that occur? Will there be a review of all the storage units? Will everybody have to send in a picture? Will the existing information be reviewed? The police already have compliance programs so they must know what containers are available and the standard of them. Will they publish a list? Will there be a recall scenario so people have fair warning?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The knowledge the police hold is that licence holders are compliant with the minimum standard. Beyond that, many people may exceed that already and the police are not necessarily aware of that.

With respect to grandfathering for a low number of firearms, it will be the current minimum standard and then for a period of time they will be grandfathered. Subject to the number of firearms and the type of firearm, that might dictate other levels of security that will be required. That will be determined in consultation with interested parties.

Ms L. METTAM: To set out and provide clarity around what would be able to be grandfathered, what sort of time frame does the minister anticipate is needed to provide that information?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Without setting a hard target, the hope is that it would be by the middle of the year—well in advance of the law coming into effect. There will be requirements around more onerous or more demanding obligations around storage for the new regime for other numbers and types of firearms, so if there is a need for some people to upgrade their storage or security, providers will be capable of meeting that requirement in the time frame for transition.

Ms L. METTAM: What constitutes "compliance" and how will the minister ensure that lawful firearm owners are compliant?

Mr P. PAPALIA: As I indicated earlier, the consultation around determining levels of storage or the enhanced security required for different numbers and types of firearms is yet to be completed. That will be underway and will inform what is required for compliant storage. With respect to how someone will prove that they are compliant, it will effectively be a photograph in situ with geolocation confirmation of the site to confirm that it is where one says it is. But that sort of process will be determined during the consultation process to ensure that it is possible to achieve.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 305: Security arrangements for firearms and related things in transit —

Mr R.S. LOVE: We were talking before about security arrangements for firearms and related things in transit. There are two sections here in this block of clauses 305 and 306, so the discussion could range over the two perhaps. The word "transit" would imply the person is in possession of a firearm but somehow they are not in a vehicle. Under what conditions would the security arrangements for firearms and related things in transit apply as opposed to it being in a vehicle? Might the person be in a motel unit or something while they are on their way somewhere and they have the weapon in their possession? What is envisaged by this provision?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The Leader of the Opposition is right about his suggested situation. It could be in a hotel or somewhere where the licence holder is in transit to another place to go shooting. They should comply with those obligations in that location while they are in transit.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do not want to dwell on this for too long because we would like to honour an agreement that the member for Roe made to complete this at a reasonable hour. I am looking at clause 305(1)(b), which talks about the regulations. Are there regulations, scenarios or practices already in place that are considered reasonable by police that might point to these regulations, or are we waiting for some sort of prescription? It would seem difficult because the scenario might be different anywhere someone is.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The current regulations are fairly lax, or non-existent you might say, with respect to detail around those measures. Things being considered are potentially requiring a trigger lock, removal of a bolt or something an action like that to render the firearm safe. Those things are being considered but the regulations have not yet been concluded. Again, that consultation will continue and we will seek input from interested parties. Public safety will be better than what it is now.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is right.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 306: Security arrangements for firearms and related things in transit in vehicle —

Mr R.S. LOVE: We are on clause 306. The question I asked before was about a pretty commonplace scenario. A person might have a firearm for whatever they might do with it, but they have other things to do on the property as well, which might mean that they leave the firearm in the ute while they work in the yards or do something else. What will the situation be there? Will it be problematic if the vehicle is unattended? The vehicle might be securely locked but it is not always easy in a smaller vehicle or a ute to make the firearm invisible. How will that work in practical terms? Will people have to make an arrangement in the vehicle?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I note that it will probably not always be viable for the firearm not to be visible, but if it is in a locked vehicle, that will be the best available measure that can be applied to comply with these requirements, noting that at the moment I do not think that is even specified. I am informed that there is a court precedent that confirms a case of a firearm being concealed and that being the best that could have been done. In this case, we are detailing some measures that will improve security. That will be a good thing. It will be reasonable if a person is on their property and it is not possible to conceal the firearm.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 307 and 308 put and passed.

Clause 309: Shared compliant storage —

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to get an explanation around how this will work in practice. The scenario might be that there is a house with a storage unit that has been assessed as a compliant storage unit for firearms. There are two people who do not share a licence, so they each put a gun in the cabinet and lock it. One accesses the cabinet to take their own gun out and locks it again. Will that be allowed? Is that what we are talking about here? I read this several times and got more confused. For the benefit of the house, can the minister explain how this will work? That would be good.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Essentially, the member's observation is correct. In that scenario, the individuals have licences of their own and keep a couple of firearms in the same cabinet or storage system. It is envisaged that the regulations in part 3 will refer to a measure like trigger locks as a mechanism for providing additional safety —

Mr R.S. Love: From the other user?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes. They will be responsible for their firearm. It is reasonable that they share the storage because they live in the same premises.

Ms L. METTAM: Who, ultimately, will have access to the storage? Will it be each of the licensed firearm owners?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Only licensed firearm owners will have the key or access via combination. I have been informed that this is a recommendation of the Law Reform Commission report to enable shared compliant storage. We are trying to find the number of the recommendation. Recommendation 115 of the Law Reform Commission report states —

In the case of co-habiting licence holders the Firearms Legislation should permit them to share their storage safes on condition that each firearm in the shared safe has a fitted trigger lock.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 310: Regulations: storage —

Mr R.S. LOVE: Clause 310 refers to the regulations for storage. It states ----

- (1) The regulations may make provision for or with respect to the storage of firearms and related things, including provision for ...
 - (a) requirements as to how a firearm or related thing must be stored, including requirements as to the design, construction, placement and fixing of storage facilities;
 - (b) requirements for security arrangements on premises to be used for the storage of firearms and related things, including requirements for security alarms, premises surveillance and surveillance monitoring.
- (2) The regulations may prescribe circumstances in which a firearm or related thing is not required to be stored in compliant storage.

I have a question on clause 310(1)(b), which is the requirement for other security measures.

Is it envisaged that a person with a number of guns that does not exceed their limit—10 for the primary producer licence, 10 for the competition licence and five for the hunting licence—will not need elaborate security devices? I am not talking about collectors with a very large number of guns. Alternatively, is it envisaged that measures other than a compliant cabinet will be required for those smaller holdings of firearms?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is not that specific. It will depend on not only the numbers, but also the risk associated with the location, the types of firearms and the attractiveness and other considerations around the need for additional security. As I indicated earlier, some licence holders exceed the minimum requirement already and, subject to consultation with interested parties around what the new storage obligations will look like, some of the current licence holders may already meet the future requirement. We cannot really say they will all be required to upgrade or they all will not be. It will be subject to each circumstance. The considerations around the regulations for additional storage are prompted by consultation at the outset. The Western Australian Firearms Community Alliance in particular in the early stages of this consultation advocated for increased storage obligations as a means to enhance public safety, as did other people. The Law Reform Commission report recommended that that is an approach to adopt as well. Some licence holders will need to upgrade their storage, but some may not because they already exceed the minimum and they may have exceeded the future intended requirement.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 311 put and passed.

Clause 312: Grounds for refusal or cancellation of firearm authority storage arrangements and facilities —

Ms L. METTAM: Can this decision be appealed at the State Administrative Tribunal?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, because it is a decision by the commissioner.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 313: Commercial transport of firearms and related things —

Mr R.S. LOVE: This clause has been troublesome for quite some time for people wanting to transport their firearms across Australia in particular. The National Party has raised the issue on various occasions with numerous organisations, including Australia Post and the Western Australia Police Force. I am pleased to see this clause in here. I am seeking an understanding. Clause 313(3) states —

The regulations may make provision for or with respect to the requirements that must be complied with by a person in connection with a commercial firearm transport activity.

Given the issues that we have had getting carriers et cetera for firearms, can I have an assurance that the regulations will be made with a view to doing what we can to enable the commercial transit of firearms in a manner that has been very difficult in Western Australia over the last few years?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The short answer is yes. I would like to acknowledge the advocacy of the Western Australian Firearms Traders Association in this regard. They have been engaged with police for some time, calling for reform of this part of the law. This is the solution and I think they will be happy about it.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 314 put and passed.

Clause 315: Commissioner may make firearms prohibition order —

Mr R.S. LOVE: This provision allows the commissioner to make firearms prohibition orders if the commissioner is satisfied that —

- (a) the person is not a fit and proper person ...
- (b) possession of a firearm by the person would likely result in unlawful use ...
- (c) the person is a member of a disqualifying organisation; or
- (d) it is otherwise in the public interest to make a firearms prohibition order against the person.

I am very much in favour of paragraphs (a), (b) and (c), provided (a) is a process that we all understand and feel comfortable with. I think we are still discussing a few things around the health aspects. Paragraph (d) reads —

it is otherwise in the public interest to make a firearms prohibition order against the person.

Can the minister give me an understanding why that paragraph is required and how he would see it operating?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Member, this essentially replicates the status quo. The law is one that we passed through this place a couple of years ago, with the exception of paragraph (c), "the person is a member of a disqualifying organisation" because at that time, we did not have "disqualifying organisations" available to us. Beyond that, nothing in here is not already the law today. It will enable the commissioner to have the ability to act in the public interest to make a firearms prohibition order against a person. It will give flexibility for the commissioner to make one of those orders in the public interest.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister pointed out that provision (d) is currently in legislation. Can the minister enlighten the house whether it has been used; and, if so, how often?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Leader of the Opposition, prohibition orders generally have been employed. I understand 48 are active. I do not know whether that consideration was specifically employed for the issuing of prohibition orders.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 316 to 332 put and passed.

Clause 333: Review of decisions by Tribunal —

Mr R.S. LOVE: This clause falls under part 9, "Review of decisions". We know that some decisions have been taken away from certain measures of review. Clause 333 states —

A person aggrieved by a decision can apply to the Tribunal for a review of the decision.

However, "decision" is defined under clause 332 as -

... a decision to impose a restriction, limitation or condition) made by or on behalf of the Commissioner, or a delegate of the Commissioner, under this Act;

We have skipped over quite a bit, so can the minister list the matters that can be reviewed by the State Administrative Tribunal, and the matters that have been taken away from that process?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is any decision. The Leader of the Opposition referred to the definition "a decision to impose a restriction, limitation or condition". It includes those, but it does not exclude anything else, so it is any decision. Whenever the commissioner's power to make a decision is used, it is subject to appeal.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is interesting because the rhetoric has been that people have gained legal access to large numbers of firearms, but in a way that the commissioner has said that they should not have access, and they have gone to SAT and received an approval. Is the minister saying that that system could still occur under the current regime?

Mr P. PAPALIA: This provision provides much greater clarity around the commissioner's decision-making process and what the commissioner can consider. Therefore, it is anticipated that that will result in less likelihood of successful challenges to those decisions, where they can be challenged. Beyond that, there is also the creation of disqualifying orders under clauses 9 and 10. Those are not a decision of the commissioner and are therefore not subject to appeal before SAT. There is no decision to be made; these offences attract a disqualifying order, so they cannot be appealed. I think that is the rhetoric that the Leader of the Opposition referred to, with regard to those offences.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 334: Hearsay evidence in review proceedings —

Mr R.S. LOVE: Clause 334 makes provision for hearsay evidence in review proceedings. Can the minister give me an idea of why this clause appears to seek to bring about representations that can be made that would not normally be admissible as evidence? Is that correct? Can the minister explain why this provision is required?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am informed by people who know that the tribunal can accept evidence of that nature already, and it will give whatever weight it decides to that evidence. That complies with the current practices of SAT and it will also enable the use of body-worn camera vision from police to potentially be used before SAT.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 335: Notifying Tribunal of exempt material —

Mr R.S. LOVE: This clause refers to the commissioner letting the State Administrative Tribunal know that there is exempt material. Exempt material means material that is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 1992. Clause 335(3)(a) states —

the Attorney General cannot issue a certificate under the SAT Act section 159(2) in relation to notified exempt material;

Why is that provision in there and what is its effect?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am informed that this entire clause is the current status quo. The purpose of clause 335(3)(a) is to prevent police being issued an order by the Attorney General to release information to SAT. There may be reasons for the police wanting to retain that information in confidence depending on the source, the nature of the information and the intelligence indications around compromising sources and the like.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 336 to 338 put and passed.

Clause 339: Surrender of firearms and related things —

Ms M. BEARD: I need clarity on this, although I think I know the answer. If people go past the amnesty date and need to surrender their firearm but have not voluntarily handed their gun back, will they be able to sell it interstate?

Mr P. PAPALIA: If it is a licensed firearm, they could, but that is not what this clause relates to. It relates to unlicensed firearms. I think I understood the nature of the member's question. People can sell their firearm after the completion of the buyback scheme and until the act comes into effect. If they want to sell it or dispose of it lawfully, they can.

Ms M. BEARD: That is what I was alluding to. If it is unlicensed, does it have to go back to the police station? Can it not be sold to an interstate dealer or buyer? Does it have to be licensed?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Sorry, if the member is referring to someone being in possession of an unlicensed firearm, there is an enduring amnesty. That is an enduring amnesty under a national cabinet agreement. Right now, totally unrelated to this, if anyone out there has an unlicensed firearm that they want to surrender to police, there is an amnesty. They will not get themselves in trouble. They can avail themselves of that opportunity, but they should probably notify the police station that they are coming with it before they go.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 340 to 344 put and passed.

Clause 345: Power to enter and search vehicles and places —

Mr R.S. LOVE: This clause will provide the power to enter and search vehicles and places. Are there provisions in other legislation or other areas of police procedure that allow police to exercise similar powers of entry without a warrant to those that will be exercised under this provision?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am informed that under the Criminal Investigation Act, there are general powers to search without a warrant under certain circumstances. I am aware that under this legislation, prohibition orders will enable a search without warrant, as occurs under the Misuse of Drugs Act when a border search area is in force; police can search without a warrant within those areas. There are probably others, including a vehicle search authorisation. There are a number of other bits of legislation that enable it.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 346 to 410 put and passed.

Clause 411: Continued operation of 1973 Act authority as transitional authority —

Mr R.S. LOVE: This is about the changeover. I am happy for the minister to talk in more general terms and then we can move on. I think the minister has an amendment a little further on.

Mr P. Papalia: That is true.

Mr R.S. LOVE: This will probably be the end of it for me. Could the minister explain the process of the authority provided under the 1973 act as we move towards transition? We might stop at part 17 for a moment to get the expected dates of the repeal of the old act and the regulations. Can the minister explain how the transition will occur so that people can get an idea? I do not think we will need to go through everything in detail if that is done.

Mr P. PAPALIA: This transitional authority is to enable an orderly and controlled process to move licence holders to the new law from the old act and the authorisations under it so we do not have everyone trying to do it at once, creating difficulties or concerns. Overall, most firearm authority holders under the 1973 act will be able to retain their licence permit approval or exemption during the transitional period, which will become a transitional authority until renewal, when they may be issued a replacement authority, which is a licence permit or approval under the new act. The commissioner may extend the term of a transitional authority if required. Transitional authorities are subject to the provisions of the new act relating to the cancellation and supervision. The commissioner will be able to suspend, cancel or amend the term of a transitional authority according to provisions of the new act—for example, the fit and proper requirement. This will be an unlikely scenario and it will not impact most firearm authorities upon commencement, and they are listed in clause 9 of the bill.

Mr R.S. LOVE: As part of the transitional authority, the minister tabled in the house this document—the mandatory health assessment briefing note. It refers to the transition, and has options 1, 2 and 3. This is to do with the health system. Would that be commensurate with the transition of those licences? It refers to a one–five-year period or a two–10-year period.

Mr P. PAPALIA: We went with the five-year period. I want to reiterate what I said at the outset. That was a briefing note with observations or recommendations from the police at a point in time. It also had, as an attachment, a form that may or may not be the form. The document is an indicator of what was being considered at that point. The Leader of the Opposition can see where I have circled option 1, which we went with, in the recommendations.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 412: Cancellation of transitional authority —

Mr P. PAPALIA: This is not necessarily related to this clause. As an additional piece of information about clause 411, the reason we selected five years is because that will be the maximum term of the new licence. That is an opportunity for people to have a five-year licence, so it aligns with that.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 413 to 437 put and passed.

Clause 438: Firearms Act 1973 repealed —

Mr R.S. LOVE: Clause 438 is the repeal of the Firearms Act 1973 and subsequent to that is a separate clause, clause 439, which is the repeal of the 1974 regulations. If the transitional period is five years, as has been selected, does that mean that we expect the repeal of this provision to come into operation in five years from commencement?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Leader of the Opposition, the answer is no. The only thing that will have a five-year transition period is the health assessments. Beyond that, the old act will be repealed in March next year and the new act will commence in March next year.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 439: Firearms Regulations 1974 repealed —

Mr R.S. LOVE: The regulations that are now in place will be repealed, presumably when the old act is also repealed. That indicates that the new regulations must be formed and ready to be gazetted at that time. Will the transitional period from one set of regulations to another be during that period or will there be a savings provision for the old regulations for some time?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The new regulations will be gazetted in December and come into effect in March.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 440: Act amended —

Ms L. METTAM: Similarly, in relation to the consequential amendments to the Children and Community Services Act 2004, when will those changes come into effect?

Mr P. PAPALIA: All consequential amendments will take effect when the new act comes into effect in March.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 441 to 443 put and passed.

Clause 444 put and negatived.

New clause 444 —

Mr P. PAPALIA: I move —

Page 216, after line 24 — To insert —

444. Section 227A inserted

At the end of Part 14 insert:

227A. Savings

A reference in Schedule 1 clause 2 to an offence under a provision of the *Firearms Act 2024* Part 5 Divisions 1 to 4 includes an offence against the regulations made under the *Firearms Act 1973* section 6(1).

Clause 444 of the bill was going to insert a new provision, proposed section 229, in part 15 of the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003. Parliamentary Counsel's Office alerted the WA Police Force that a change to the Firearms Bill would be needed as a consequence of the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Amendment Bill 2023. That other bill was before the other place when the Firearms Bill was introduced, but it has now passed the Parliament. The Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Amendment Bill contained provisions to insert proposed sections 229 to 233 into part 15 of the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act. As a consequence of those reforms, the provision in clause 444 of the Firearms Bill needed to be updated. It is proposed that we insert a new clause 444 into the Firearms Bill that will insert proposed section 227A into part 14 of the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003. The substantive provisions in proposed section 227A are the same as those previously contained in proposed section 229. However, Parliamentary Counsel's Office determined that proposed section 227A would be better placed in part 14 of the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act rather than part 15 of that act. This change in placement has no actual or practical effect on the substantive changes being made to the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003.

New clause put and passed.

Clauses 445 to 492 put and passed.

Title put and passed.