

FIREARMS AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 61

Continued from 18 March 2026.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Police): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill now be read a second time and that I make my contribution to the second reading.

I would like to address the recommendations of the scrutiny committee, and I thank the scrutiny committee for their work and for recommending that the Bill be passed without amendment. I also note the Recommendations 2, 3 and 4 seek further information. These Recommendations request amendments to the Explanatory Memorandum, which is already being tabled in parliament. Instead, I will address the matters that the committee has raised here by way of explanation.

In relation to Recommendation 2, concerning the timely processing of licensing, applications and renewals, the Bills sets clear parameters for how long a licence may remain in force beyond its expiry, where a renewal application has been lodged. A licence will cease to be in force if it is revoked, or once an application is granted or refused. Consideration was given to establishing a statutory processing timeframe, however, processing times vary depending on application volumes and operational factors. For this reason, a fixed statutory timeframe is not considered appropriate.

In relation to Recommendation 3, which seeks a general outline of the Bill, I will deal with that in a moment.

In relation to Recommendation 4, concerning changes to the penalty provisions in section 68, these amendments are necessary. At present, there is no clear prohibition on destroying a firearm or rendering it inoperable. The Bill addresses this by making it an offence to alter a firearm in a way that destroys it or renders it inoperable, unless authorised to do so. The increase in penalty reflects the seriousness of the offence, it also brings the Territory into line with other Australian jurisdictions.

In respect to Recommendation 3, first the Bill extends the maximum duration of firearm, corporate and employee licences for up to 10 years or a shorter period where appropriate. This provides greater certainty for legitimate operators, reduces unnecessary administrative burden and allows businesses to focus on their day-to-day operations, whilst maintaining appropriate oversight. This reform implements a recommendation of the approvals fast-tracked taskforce and responds directly to feedback from industry. The task force comprises of industry experts from across the Territory engaged extensively with peak bodies, businesses and senior representatives to identify practical reforms that support economic activity, including for small businesses across construction, hospitality, agriculture and aquaculture.

It found that current renewal settings create unnecessary delays and avoidable administrative touchpoints, particularly in agriculture and aquaculture; extending licence durations addresses these issues. This reform also aligns with the government's broader work to modernise systems, including the National Firearms Register. More importantly, the Bill also ensures continuity by allowing a licence to remain in force while a renewal application is being considered, provided it is lodged before expiry. This is a practical change that allows lawful activities to continue without unnecessary interruption.

To support this, the Northern Territory Firearms Policy and Recording Unit will provide licence holders with confirmation once an application for the same licence type has been lodged, which will serve as proof of currency until a decision is made. The Bill strengthens the powers of the Commissioner by enabling licence and permit conditions to be varied, revoked or added during the life of a licence. This ensures conditions remain current and appropriate and allows police to respond to risks as they emerge. These powers will be exercised on a case-by-case basis having regard to the individual circumstances of each licence or permit holder.

They may be used following a compliance check in response to intelligence or complaint, or where there are concerns about a persons continued suitability to hold a licence. They may also address specific issues such as storage arrangements or relevant medical considerations. More importantly, these decisions will be subject to appropriate safeguards.

Decisions to vary, revoke or impose conditions will be reviewable by the NTCAT, consistent with existing processes under the Act. This ensures licence and permit holders are afforded natural justice through an established and transparent avenue of administrative review.. Further reforms strengthen governance arrangements, including changes to the Firearms Advisory Council. The council will operate under an independent chairperson and report directly to the minister. A key function of the council is to review the

operations of the *Firearms Act* and provide advice and recommendations. These amendments respond to feedback of the current structure to better reflect a broader range of perspectives and strengthen transparency.

At present recommendations are provided through the chairperson by the commissioner before being considered by the minister. These changes streamline that process, enable more direct reporting and reinforce the independence of the council. They also expand the council's composition and governance setting supporting more balance, input and strengthening confidence in the advice that informs decision making.

The Bill also introduces new offences to address emerging risk and close the gaps in current framework. These relate to the destruction of firearms, the possession of digital blueprints used to manufacture firearms or firearm components. They reflect developments in technology and align the Territory with other jurisdictions responding to the growing risk of illicit firearm manufacture. There has been some community interest in how these provisions will operate in practice. Let me be clear, these offences are targeted. They are designed to capture the intentional possession, creation or distribution of digital blueprints that can be used to manufacture firearms or firearm components using technology such as 3D printers or electronic milling machines.

They are not intended to capture ordinary or incidental material such as manuals, historical documents or general imagery that cannot be used for that purpose. The offence requires intent. A person must knowingly possess or deal with a digital blueprint for the purpose of manufacture. There are also clear and appropriate exemptions including for law enforcement purposes, the use in legal proceedings, or where a person is authorised under a licence or permit to manufacture a firearm or component. These provisions are proportionate and enforceable, and they respond to a real and emerging risk. The Bill strengthens record keeping and accountability requirements. It introduces a requirement for licence, permit and registration holders to notify the Commissioner where a firearm has been destroyed, rendered inoperable, disposed of, damaged or defaced. This ensures records remain accurate and up to date supporting compliance, enforcement and the safe management of firearms across the Territory.

The Bill also amends existing offence provisions including strengthening penalties for altering firearms to bring them inline with other Australian jurisdictions. In addition, the Bill provides for the temporary recognition of interstate firearm licences. This allows visitors to lawfully possess, use and purchase ammunition while in the Territory for approved activities. This Bill's existing arrangements and ensures visiting licence holders can participate in firearms-related activities such as sporting events safely and lawfully while in the Territory. These reforms support legitimate participation in firearms-related tourism and events which form part of the Territory lifestyle and contribute to the economy.

Taken together, these reforms modernise the Act and improve how it operates in practice. They reduce unnecessary red tape, provide greater detail, clarity and certainty and ensure the system is responsive to both operational needs and emerging risk. At the same time they strengthen the regulation and management of firearms, supporting police, reinforcing safeguards and reducing the risk of firearms being diverted into the black market or falling into the hands of organised crime.

This is about getting the balance right, supporting responsible firearm ownership, recognising its place in the Territory lifestyle and economy while backing police to keep the community safe. This Bill is another step in delivering a safer stronger and growing Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, guns have a legitimate and enduring place in the Northern Territory. They are an essential tool for primary producers managing land and pests. Our rangers use them to manage feral animals that pose environmental and community risks. They are used by Aboriginal Territorians for hunting on traditional lands, and of course, we have many avid sporting and recreational shooters across the Territory who enjoy getting out on the weekend to hunt magpie geese or feral pigs or spend time at the firing range.

Our Territory Labor opposition supports the right of Territorians to access and responsibly use firearms for lawful purposes, but that right must be balanced with a clear priority—community safety. That means a regulatory system that is robust, actively maintained, responsive to change, continuously improved and to match community sentiment.

This Bill makes some sensible and necessary updates. However, it is yet another example of the CLP government tinkering around the edges and reacting to issues rather than tackling meaningful reform that would make a difference to Territorians' lives.