



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

15<sup>th</sup> Assembly

## LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Public Briefing Transcript

### Inquiry into the Firearms Amendment Bill 2026

2.15 pm, Tuesday 24 March 2026

Litchfield Room, Level 3, Parliament House

**Members:** Mrs Oly Carlson MLA, Chair, Member for Wulagi  
Mr Clinton Howe MLA, Deputy Chair, Member for Drysdale  
Justine Davis MLA, Member for Johnston  
Mr Chanston Paech MLA, Member for Gwoja  
Mrs Laurie Zio MLA, Member for Fannie Bay

**Witnesses:** *Northern Territory Police Force*  
Travis Wurst: Acting Deputy Commissioner  
Beth Nolan: Acting Executive Director, Police Legal  
Jess Readman: Acting Director, Police Legal  
Kirna McLaren: Senior Lawyer

**INQUIRY INTO THE FIREARMS AMENDMENT BILL 2026**  
**Northern Territory Police Force**

**Madam CHAIR:** Good afternoon. On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public briefing into the Firearms Amendment Bill 2026.

I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee from the Northern Territory Police Force, Travis Wurst, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Northern Territory Police Force; Beth Nolan, Acting Executive Director, Police Legal; and Kiran McLaren, Senior Lawyer. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public briefing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. If at any time during the hearing you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask the committee to go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

Could you please each state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

**Mr WURST:** Acting Deputy Commissioner Travis Wurst, Northern Territory Police.

**Ms NOLAN:** Beth Nolan, Acting Executive Director of Police Legal.

**Ms McLAREN:** Kiran McLaren, Senior Lawyer.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you. Acting Deputy Commissioner, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr WURST:** I would, thank you.

Firstly, I am here representing the Northern Territory Police Commissioner, Martin Dole APM, who is currently otherwise busy in emergency management matters.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to brief on the Firearms Amendment Bill 2026. The purpose of this Bill is to amend the *Firearms Act 1997* to implement Recommendation 5A of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce Report and related purposes that support the implementation of Recommendation 5A.

Through this briefing our intention is to provide the committee with an overview of the key amendments contained within the Bill, being:

- (a) implementation of Recommendation 5A of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce Report;
- (b) inserting the ability for a licence to remain valid whilst an application for the same licence type is being considered by the Commissioner;
- (c) inserting a power for the Commissioner to revoke or vary a firearms licence or permit during its currency;
- (d) amending the membership of the Firearms Advisory Council, including having an independent chairperson, and the Firearms Advisory Council reporting directly to the Minister;
- (e) inserting offences for destroying a firearm and for possessing digital blueprints for a firearm manufactured by a 3D printer; and,
- (f) amending temporary recognition of interstate licensees coming to the Territory to participate in firearms-related activities, including lawful purchase, use and possession of ammunition whilst in the Territory.

The Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce was established in November 2024 to provide expert advice on streamlining approvals and removing unnecessary and burdensome regulatory policies and practices. The Taskforce comprised of industry experts from across the Territory and engaged widely with peak bodies, business and senior representatives to identify reforms that would benefit business, including small business across construction, hospitality, agriculture and aquaculture sectors.

On 16 July 2025, the Northern Territory Government released the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce Report, Saying 'Yes' to Business, and its formal response to the final recommendations.

Recommendation 5 of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce Report sought to extend licence renewal periods to reduce unnecessary touchpoints with government. The recommendation included a specific tranche 1 reform proposal for the Northern Territory Police Force—namely:

*5A. That NT Government should, as part of implementing the National Firearms Register, work with industry to identify options to allow renewal of commercial (Corporate and Employee) Firearms Licences.*

The Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce Report went on to highlight that:

1. the lack of renewal opportunities for commercial firearms licences can cause delays for businesses in the agriculture and aquaculture sectors; and,
2. the Act could provide an option to extend corporate and employee licence renewal periods for a further five years. This will lessen the administrative burden and time delays. Longer licence periods will also provide increased business certainty. This reform should be considered as part of the government's implementation of the National Firearms Register.

Clause 7 of the Bill formalises Recommendation 5A of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce Report. This is achieved by amending section 14(1) to extend the period of a firearms corporate licence and firearms employee licence from five to 10 years (or a shorter period if specified in the licence). This amendment gives effect to existing Northern Territory Government commitments relating to the accepted recommendations of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce.

To support the Recommendation 5A implementation, clause 7 of the Bill introduces the ability for a licence to remain valid whilst an application for the same licence type is being considered by the Commissioner by inserting new subsections (4) and (5) under section 14.

New subsection (4) will allow for a licence to continue to be enforced beyond its expiry, as long as: the application for a new firearms licence for the same type has been lodged before the expiry of the existing licence, and the licence application has not yet been granted or refused, and the existing licence has not been revoked.

Further, new subsection (5) will provide that, where those requirements under new subsection (4) apply, the original licence will continue to be in force until: the new licence is granted, or the new licence is refused, or the existing licence is revoked. This will ensure licence holders are not adversely affected if there are delays in any administrative process.

Other key amendments in the Bill address some of the legislative deficiencies and some urgent operational issues that impeded the daily operations of the Firearms Policy and Recording Unit within the Northern Territory Police.

Firstly, at present the Commissioner is only able to exercise express powers to impose a condition on a licence at the time the licence or permit is granted. It is not exercisable during the currency of a licence or permit. This means the Commissioner cannot revoke, vary or impose a new condition on a licence or permit once it has been granted.

Clauses 6 and 8 of the Bill insert the ability for the Commissioner to revoke or vary a condition of a licence or permit during its currency. This also allows the Commissioner to include further conditions on a licence or permit. It is envisaged that these amendments will enhance the safety of the community and police officers by ensuring that the most appropriate conditions are in place for a licence or a permit holder.

Furthermore, a decision to revoke, vary or impose a new condition on a licence or permit will be considered a reviewable decision which is conducted by the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NTCAT).

Secondly, currently the *Firearms Act 1997* sets out a structure for the Firearms Advisory Council membership, being; executive members of the Northern Territory Firearms Council Inc, a police officer as the Chairperson, and other persons appointed by the Minister in consultation with the Northern Territory Firearms Council Inc. The Council does not reflect balanced community views due to its limited membership.

Recommendations by the Firearms Advisory Council are provided through the chairperson via the Commissioner. The Commissioner then takes the recommendations to the Minister. This process is not sufficiently independent or transparent.

Clause 9 of the Bill amends the structure of the Firearms Advisory Council established under section 55 of the *Firearms Act 1997*. The amendment to section 65 of the Act creates greater balance, independence and more transparency for the Firearms Advisory Council. This is achieved by creating an independent chairperson who has the ability to report directly to the Minister.

These amendments come directly from consultation and review by the Firearms Advisory Council, reflecting the recommendations made by the Firearms Advisory Council.

Thirdly, the current legislation does not allow interstate licence holders to purchase ammunition. As a result, individuals with interstate licences are required to bring their own ammunition, which presents logistical and safety challenges.

Clauses 12, 13 and 15 of the Bill amend sections 68A, 69 and 92 respectively to expand the ability to possess, use and purchase ammunition by interstate licence holders in the Territory. These are necessary amendments to reflect and implement an existing amnesty which allows interstate licence holders to purchase ammunition in the Territory. This amendment is administrative in nature.

Fourthly, currently the holder of a licence, permit or certificate of registration is only required to notify the Commissioner if a firearm licence, permit or certificate of registration is lost or stolen. As a result, firearms that are destroyed, defaced or damaged have not been reported to the Commissioner and are not currently traceable.

Clause 14 of the Bill expands the circumstances for matters where a holder of a licence, permit or certificate of registration is required to notify the Commissioner of in section 90(2) and (4). This amendment will require licence holders to notify the Commissioner of any destruction, defacement or damage to a firearm.

To address the historical deficiencies of insufficient reporting obligations, clause 17 of the Bill will create a requirement for any person who holds a licence, permit or certificate of registration and who previously destroyed, defaced, damaged or disposed of a firearm or rendered a firearm wholly or partly inoperable to notify the Commissioner within 30 days of the amendment Act commencing. This is necessary to ensure all firearm records are up to date, with a goal to ensure firearms in the community are traceable. This requirement will be enforced through a new offence provision and will be a component of our public communication strategy.

Fifthly, section 68 of the Act currently only prohibits a person (unless approved by the Commissioner) from altering a firearm in a way that affects its safe operation or converts the firearm to another category of firearm.

Clause 11 of the Bill will amend section 68 to also prohibit a person from altering a firearm in a way that destroys it or renders it or part of it, inoperative.

Lastly, clause 10 of the Bill inserts an offence for the possession of digital blueprints for firearms, or a part of a firearm, manufactured by 3D printers in new section 61B. A person commits an offence if: the person intentionally produces, sells, distributes or possesses a thing; and the thing is a digital blueprint for the manufacturing of a firearm, or a part of a firearm, on a 3D printer or an electronic milling machine. Part of a firearm includes a silencer or any other article related to a firearm that is prescribed by regulation.

This clause also inserts new definitions for 'digital blueprint' and 'possession'.

Pursuant to section 4(4) of the Act, this new offence will not apply to people who possess a digital blueprint for manufacture of firearms, or a part of a firearm: for the purpose connected to law enforcement function or for the preparation or conduct of a criminal proceeding; or a person authorised by a licence or permit to manufacture a firearm based on a digital blueprint.

In line with modern drafting principles and practices, Part IIAA of the Criminal Code applies to this offence.

This amendment Bill responds to emerging technologies that enable the production of unregistered and untraceable firearms, which present a significant threat to public safety. By criminalising the possession of

such blueprints, it is envisaged that this will prevent the proliferation of unregulated firearms and reduce the risk of their diversion to the black market.

These amendments support the Northern Territory Government's priorities for maintain the "Territory lifestyle". While broader national firearms reform is being considered separately following the recent national events, the Bill is not a direct response to those events. For clarity, these amendments will not introduce firearms caps or controls.

The Bill will, in turn, standardise the process and regulation around owning a firearm, thereby benefiting the firearms community and the Northern Territory.

We thank the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting this Bill.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, Acting Deputy Commissioner.

My name is Oly Carlson; I am the Member for Wanguri and the Chair. Online I have the deputy, the Member for Drysdale, Clinton Howe. Also Chansey Paech, the Member for Gwoja, is online. I have the Member for Fannie Bay, Laurie Zio; and the Member for Johnston, Justine Davis, today.

I will open up the floor for questions.

**Mrs ZIO:** Can you talk to the committee today about what consultation was undertaken during the development of this Bill, please?

**Mr WURST:** I can. The Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce comprised of industry experts from across the Territory and engaged widely with peak bodies, business and senior representatives to identify reforms that will benefit business, including small business across construction, hospitality, agriculture and aquaculture sectors. Consultation also occurred with the Firearms Advisory Council in relation to amendments in the Bill relating to clause 9. Consultation has not ceased; it is ongoing with industry stakeholders.

**Mrs ZIO:** I loved your fast prompt response; it is great.

I think this is a good pragmatic piece of legislation. I particularly like the work that has happened around the 3D-printed firearms protection stuff. It is a new offence for digital blueprints and a proactive step against privately manufactured firearms, like we have seen in Nhulunbuy. How will the Firearms Policy and Recording Unit leverage existing intelligence to enforce this effectively and educate the community on exemptions for legitimate research like artistic, scientific or general interest?

**Mr WURST:** In relation to the manufacture of ...

**Mrs ZIO:** Yes.

**Mr WURST:** Based on what the national framework currently is around serious organised crime, this has been an emerging issue national and internationally. That work and research has already been done. It has been drawn into the Territory in our own local experiences, where we are not immune to this proliferation process.

As a consequence of that, once the Bill is before parliament we will commence our engagement process with the community to ensure that anyone who is currently in possession understands an offence will be created. There will be an amnesty-type process where people can hand in and dispose of or destroy them themselves. It will be an offence to possess, use and manufacture as a consequence of possessing those digital blueprints.

**Mrs ZIO:** Strict liability applies to the physical elements of this offence. Could you please explain why it is necessary to apply strict liability in this instance?

**Mr WURST:** I will hand to my colleagues.

**Ms NOLAN:** I will take that one.

With this offence, strict liability applies to the element that is in subsection (1)(b). Strict liability means that the actual element does not have fault elements to it, so there is no intention, knowledge, recklessness or negligence attached to it. That means the prosecution do not have to prove that the person knew that the

item was a digital blueprint for the manufacture of firearms; however, because it is a strict liability offence that means that mistake of fact still applies as a defence.

In the Criminal Code mistake of fact is a defence that applies where if the person thought about whether the fact applied existed or not, they came to a mistaken but reasonable belief about that fact. They were wrong in that fact, but if they had been correct then the offence would not have been committed. That would be a matter for the person to put to court.

**Mrs ZIO:** Interesting, thank you.

A similar offence provision in the *Firearms Act 1996* for New South Wales sets out specific defences for a person accused of possessing a digital blueprint, including if a person did not know they possessed the blueprint, took steps to get rid of it. Was the inclusion of specific defences considered in drafting this Bill and, if not, why?

**Mr WURST:** There are only two defences that are listed, as I provided in the opening statement. I am not privy to any additional consideration in relation to other defences that were considered.

**Mrs ZIO:** Maybe we can take that on notice and see if we can get some further information. Is that okay?

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Fannie Bay, are you happy to take that one on notice?

**Mrs ZIO:** Yes. Did you need me to repeat the question?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, please.

**Mrs ZIO:** Clause 10, Possession of digital blueprints for manufacture of firearms: a similar offence provision in the *Firearms Act 1996* for New South Wales sets out specific defences for a person accused of possessing a digital blueprint, including if a person did not know they possessed the blueprint or they took steps to get rid of it. Was the inclusion of specific defences considered in drafting this Bill and, if not, why? I might just add to that: do you foresee any risks that might arise from omitting any defence?

**Mr WURST:** Omitting?

**Mrs ZIO:** Yes, any defences.

**Madam CHAIR:** We can take those together on notice.

**J DAVIS:** Thanks for coming.

The explanatory statement notes that clause 11 makes minor and technical amendments to the existing offence for altering firearms. That includes expanding the scope of the offence to include destroying or rendering firearms inoperable, as you have explained, but also increasing the maximum penalty for the offence from four to 14 years. Can you explain a little bit more about the effect of clause 11 and the rationale for that significant increase in the maximum penalty, and also why the explanatory statement does not mention this aspect of the amendment?

**Mr WURST:** This relates to the altering of firearms.

**J DAVIS:** Yes, clause 11. I am particularly interested in the increase in the penalty.

**Mr WURST:** The issue with firearms offending and offences committed in other jurisdictions has led to those other jurisdictions also increasing the offences for altering firearms. The Northern Territory has followed suit in relation to that, hence the increase of this particular offence provision to 14 years to further display the seriousness there is from a community safety perspective around the altering of a firearm and what that means, particularly in the criminal context.

**J DAVIS:** Is that in line with other jurisdictions now?

**Mr WURST:** Yes.

**J DAVIS:** Talking about being in line with other jurisdictions and extending the licence period to 10 years, what is the rationale for that, given that the national discussions are moving towards tightening gun laws, if what we are doing is trying to be in line with what is happening nationally around community safety?

**Mr WURST:** The Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce and the subsequent report was furnished prior to the events that led to the national discussion that is currently underway. The decision around increasing the licences to 10 years, as provided in the opening statement, is around providing consistency and certainty to business, particularly the agriculture and aquaculture sectors. It is specific to 5A of the Taskforce's recommendations. As I said, this is not necessarily specific to anything that is happening currently in the national discussions.

**J DAVIS:** Does it apply to all licence holders?

**Mr WURST:** No; it only applies to commercial—corporate and employee—firearms licences.

**J DAVIS:** How will regular safety and compliance checks be undertaken? Will they be undertaken over that now extended period?

**Mr WURST:** The same processes that we currently undertake with the consideration of corporate and employee licences will be maintained.

I draw the committee's attention to part (c), which relates to the Commissioner being able to revoke and vary firearm licence and permit conditions during the currency of that licence. That is something we could not do previously. Although there is the provision to allow us to extend this to 10 years, the Commissioner will also have powers to be able to vary or revoke those licence or permit conditions at the same time, which cannot currently happen.

**J DAVIS:** What would trigger that? How would that happen, just if it came to their attention? Are there any regular compliance checks over that 10-year period?

**Mr WURST:** Regular compliance is hard to quantify because of the nature of those types of licences. There are compliance checks that, however, do occur across that corporate licensing sector.

**J DAVIS:** Can you give me any more detail on what that might look like?

**Mr WURST:** I can get some further detail and provide that to the committee out of session, if that is okay.

**J DAVIS:** That would be great; thank you. Do you need that question on notice?

**Mr WURST:** Please.

**J DAVIS:** Can you provide detail of regular compliance checks as would be relevant to this Bill?

**Mrs ZIO:** If I can ask a supplementary to that line of questioning: is Police going to be providing some guidelines or training to police and to the general community to ensure that licence holders know what to expect in relation to that expanded 10-year licensing? The ability for the Commissioner to ...

**Mr WURST:** There will be. The Firearms Advisory Council have been a part of the consultation process and are aware of that. Yes, we will have a detailed communication strategy that will flow as a consequence as well.

**Madam CHAIR:** The Member for Drysdale online has some questions.

**Mr HOWE:** [Call audio indistinct.]

**Madam CHAIR:** Sorry, Clinton; I need you to stop. You are not coming through clearly. Do you want to start again?

**Mr HOWE:** How is that?

**Madam CHAIR:** Better.

**Mr HOWE:** My question relates to [Call audio indistinct.]

**Madam CHAIR:** Sorry, Clinton; it is breaking up. Do you want to type it in Teams, and I will ask it?

**J DAVIS:** I will jump in while Clinton is typing.

I wanted to come back, Acting Deputy Commissioner, to when you said this was put in place prior to the recent national discussions around these issues. Does that mean there will be any review of these in light of them?

**Mr WURST:** That will all be considered separate to this. Obviously there is a national conversation that is occurring, and the Territory is a part of that. That is all still underway and ongoing.

**J DAVIS:** Did you say that part of this—I remember the bit about being able to buy ammunition, for interstate licence holders. They also will have their licence recognised here; is that right?

**Mr WURST:** No, it was specific to ammunition only. An interstate licensee who comes to the Territory for a legitimate purpose, instead of having to bring ammunition to the Territory will be able to purchase and possess here.

**Mrs ZIO:** I have a question around the explanatory statement in the drafting of the Bill. The version that we received does not have general information about the outline of the Bill. Is there a reason why? It basically just says, 'This is the Bill'.

**Mr WURST:** I will seek the counsel of my colleagues.

**Ms McLAREN:** There was no reason why it was not included.

**Mrs ZIO:** Is that the final version? Will it just be that one line in the explanatory statement, or is that a draft?

**Ms NOLAN:** The final version is the version that is already tabled before the Assembly.

**J DAVIS:** There are some drafting errors in that version, including misnumbering clauses 15 to 17. Will that be corrected?

**Ms McLAREN:** Yes, it has been. Police secretariat will be providing an updated version. I am not sure if that process has already occurred.

**J DAVIS:** But that update will not include any general outline of the Bill?

**Ms McLAREN:** No, just to the clause numbering.

**J DAVIS:** Is there a reason? It is pretty unusual not to have a general outline of a Bill in an explanatory statement. Is there a reason for that?

**Ms McLAREN:** No reason.

**J DAVIS:** Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** I have the Member for Drysdale's question. Is the Commissioner able to suspend a licence? What is the threshold for action like that? It is easy to understand it for serious crime or risk, but what about lower-risk scenarios? Is there a provision to have it appealed or reviewed? Is it just suspension or can it be cancelled?

**Mr WURST:** I will go to the opening statement and I will detail that again. The Commissioner currently cannot revoke, vary or impose a new condition on a licence that is currently in existence. This will allow the Commissioner the ability to revoke or vary a condition of a licence or permit during its currency. This also allows the Commissioner to further add conditions to a licence or permit that cannot currently be done, and any of those decisions and directions made by the Commissioner are appealable and can be reviewed by the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is it just for corporate licences or individuals as well?

**Mr WURST:** Going back to the original question, it included suspension; that is not a part of this particular amendment. Suspension is not considered. What was the supplementary question?

**Madam CHAIR:** Is it for corporate licences or individuals?

**Mr WURST:** All licences and permits.

**Madam CHAIR:** What are the thresholds for the Commissioner to amend or vary a licence?

**Ms McLAREN:** It will be application dependent, so upon each licence or permit holder, and depending on their circumstances. It might be, for instance, in relation to an additional person living at a storage location and an additional condition needing to be applied to prevent that other person who is now living in the premises not to be in the same vicinity as where the firearms are stored. It will vary greatly, but it is case dependent.

**J DAVIS:** To clarify my question earlier about interstate licences, at the moment if someone has a licence interstate they are able to use their firearm in the Northern Territory, and now they will be able to buy ammunition as well. Will there be any safety checks or anything in relation to that for people from outside the Northern Territory?

**Ms McLAREN:** On purchasing ammunition the dealers do the checks at that point in time. The amendments in this Bill go towards legalising the ability to purchase, use and possess ammunition by those interstate licence holders. They are currently undertaking that activity under an amnesty that is allowing them to do that.

**J DAVIS:** It is formalising what is happening under the amnesty; is that right? But there is not currently, and will not be, any kind of safety standards checks or compliance checks for people from interstate who will be buying ammunition and using weapons here.

**Ms McLAREN:** Those checks are already in place and they happen by the dealer. Firearms dealers who sell ammunition or ammunition permit holders are the ones who do those checks when interstate licence holders come in to purchase ammunition.

**J DAVIS:** You can take it on notice: are you able to share what those checks involve?

**Ms McLAREN:** I can find it in the legislation, if you like.

**J DAVIS:** I am happy, given the time, for you to provide it afterwards. Could you provide the process for compliance and safety checks when people are purchasing ammunition both from the Territory and interstate?

**Madam CHAIR:** Chansey, do you have any questions?

**Mr PAECH:** No, thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much, everybody, for coming before the committee.

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The committee concluded.

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