

FIREARMS — OWNERS — MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

Statement

HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan) [9.42 pm]: First of all, I would like to say that as a feminist, I stand here in solidarity with the trans community.

Many of us have recently been receiving emails from members of the Sporting Shooters Association of Western Australia with the following concerns —

“Recently, the WA Government has announced measures that affect my chosen sport and pastime as a part of its review of the WA Firearms Act. These measures have been insinuating that registered legal firearms and firearms licence holders are a threat to public safety. The language being used by members of the government and the police suggests little regard for our community.”

Like many others, I have been asked about my thoughts on this. I was reflecting last weekend. I want to tell members about something that happened in Scotland in the 1990s. On 13 March 1996, a licensed gun owner left home and drove about five miles north to Dunblane. He arrived on the grounds of Dunblane Primary School at around 9.30 am and parked his van near a telegraph pole in the car park of the school. He cut the cables at the bottom of the telegraph pole with a pair of pliers before making his way across the car park towards the school buildings. He headed towards the north-west side of the school to a door near the toilets and the school gymnasium. After entering, he made his way to the gym with four legally held guns—two nine millimetre Browning Hi-Power pistols and two Smith & Wesson model 19 .357 Magnum revolvers. He was also carrying 743 ammunition cartridges and he was wearing shooting earmuffs.

In the gym was a class of 28 primary 1 pupils preparing for a physical education lesson in the presence of three adult members of staff. He entered and started shooting rapidly and randomly. He shot PE teacher Eileen Harrild, who was injured in her arms and chest as she attempted to protect herself, and continued shooting into the gym. Eileen stumbled into the open-plan store cupboard at the side of the gym along with several injured children. Gwen Mayor, the teacher of the primary 1 class, was shot and killed instantly. The other adult present, Mary Blake, a supervisory assistant, was shot in the head and legs, but she also managed to make her way to the store cupboard with several of the children in front of her. From entering the gym and walking a few steps, he had fired 29 shots with one of the pistols, killed one child and injured several others.

Four injured children had taken shelter in the store cupboard along with the injured Eileen and Mary. He moved up the east side of the gym, firing six shots as he walked. He then fired eight shots towards the opposite end of the gym. He walked towards the centre of the gym, firing 16 shots at point-blank range at a group of children who, having heard the earlier shots, were incapacitated with fear.

A primary 7 pupil who was walking along the west side of the gym at the time heard loud bangs and screams and looked inside. The gunman shot in his direction and the pupil was injured by flying glass as he ran away. From his position in the gym, he fired 24 shots in various directions. He fired shots towards a window next to the fire exit at the south-east end of the gym and at an adult who was walking across the playground before firing four more shots in the same direction after opening the fire exit door. He left the gym briefly through the fire exit, firing another four shots towards the cloakroom of the library, striking and injuring Grace Tweddle, another member of staff at the school.

In the mobile classroom closest to the exit where he was standing, Catherine Gordon saw him firing shots and instructed her primary 7 class to get down onto the floor before he fired nine bullets into the classroom, striking books and equipment. One bullet passed through a chair where a child had been sitting just seconds before. He re-entered the gym, dropped the pistol he was using, and took out one of the two revolvers. He put the barrel of the gun in his mouth, pointed it upwards and pulled the trigger, killing himself.

A total of 32 people sustained gunshot wounds inflicted over a three to four-minute period, 16 of whom were fatally wounded in the gymnasium—the primary 1 teacher and 15 of her pupils. One other child died en route to hospital. The teacher was Gwen Mayor. The children were Abigail McLellan, Victoria Clydesdale, Sophie North, Ross Irvine, Mhairi MacBeath, Melissa Currie, Megan Turner, Kevin Hassell, John Petrie, Joanna Ross, Hannah Scott, Emma Crozier, Emily Morten, David Kerr and Charlotte Dunn. They were all aged five. Another child who died was Brett McKinnon, aged six.

The licensed gun owner had been exhibiting signs of mental instability. He felt that he had been victimised and persecuted. Among those he complained to were Queen Elizabeth II and his local member of Parliament. The Sporting Shooters Association of Western Australia is concerned about the requirement that a person who holds a firearms licence in WA will require a mental health check. I am not sorry if this will inconvenience them in any way. I am not sorry if that measure will save one child’s life or one adult’s life. If this provision had been enacted in the United Kingdom in 1996, that teacher and those children would not have died.

