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WLB policies put farmers and primary producers' mental health at risk: KAP

KATTER'S Australian Party candidate for Callide, Adam Burling, says intrusive weapon's licensing policies are risking the mental health of farmers and producers.

The police Weapons Licensing Branch (WLB) requires applicants to declare if they have received treatment for psychiatric, emotional, alcohol or drug related problems.

Mr Burling said ticking the "yes" box triggered the requirement for the applicant to obtain a doctor's certificate indicating whether the condition affected their ability to possess or use a weapon.

"We are trying to bring mental health issues, particularly in farmers, out of the shadows and reduce the stigma attached to coming forward and saying 'yes, I need help.'

"But the licensing policy basically says if you do that you run the risk of losing access to a vital tool of the trade if you're a farmer or primary producer.

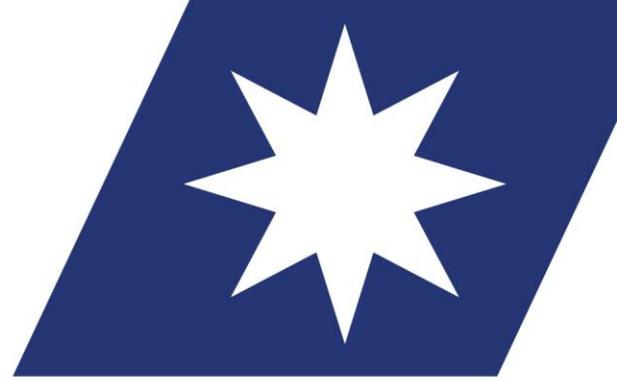
"Understandably, many of them will keep quiet and say 'nope, I'm good.'"

Shooters Union Australia president, Graham Park, said WLB were trying to make it all sound very reasonable, but the reality and implementation of the policy was completely different, with considerable overreach, delays, and potential expense involved.

"The sign-off they require from doctors isn't a generic 'Yes, John Smith is my patient and his medical issues do not affect his ability to safely own or use a firearm', it's quite a detailed declaration regarding the patient's history and treatment with the GP, and may even require a supporting statement from a specialist on top of that.

"GPs and specialists are also essentially asked to guarantee the applicant's future behaviour, which is more or less impossible – not to mention a hugely unreasonable ask of already overworked medical providers.

"There's also the fact that it's not the 1970s anymore and huge numbers of people don't have a regular 'family doctor' anymore, and instead just go to a bulk billing clinic to see whichever GP is available at the time.



“Combine a busy GP who doesn’t really know the patient except from file notes, a general wariness of firearms in the medical community, and concerns over liability from signing off on someone as suitable to have a gun forever, and you’ve got a recipe for the medico to put it in the ‘no thanks’ basket and decline to sign the paperwork.”

Mr Park said the end result was farmers or primary producers who might be experiencing mental health issues were essentially forced to choose between seeking help or losing their gun licences (and by extension, their ability to effectively manage their farms) – ironically making their mental health situation worse.

“Mental health issues have enough stigma around them without Weapons Licensing deciding that everyone who did the right thing and got help for something common deserves another kick in the teeth for their trouble.”

He stressed Shooters Union agreed it was important for significant, ‘required intensive treatment or hospitalisation’- level mental health issues to be taken into account when deciding firearms licence applications, but broadly felt the medical standards should otherwise be the same as for a driver’s licence.

“Driving a car is incredibly dangerous – you’re operating more than a tonne of metal at speeds of up to 110km/h, frequently with almost nothing separating you from someone coming the other way doing the same thing except for a painted white line in the road and maybe a metre or two of distance.

“The Department of Transport don’t care if you needed to see a doctor for a bit of help because you have a stressful job or the crop failed again or a close friend died and you weren’t coping brilliantly, because that’s got nothing to do with safely operating a vehicle.

“They care if you have epilepsy or suffer blackouts, because those things genuinely can affect someone’s ability to drive safely – and it should be the same standard for firearms licences.”

-ENDS-

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