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To: Submissions.Strategy.Support
Subject: Submission on the Police Offences Amendment (Knives and Prohibited Weapons) Bill 2026

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To: Strategy and Support
Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management

Submission on the Police Offences Amendment (Knives and Prohibited Weapons) Bill 2026

I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the Police Offences Amendment (Knives and Prohibited Weapons) Bill 2026.

I support reasonable measures to reduce violent crime and improve public safety. However, I have significant concerns that the proposed prohibition on machetes is unlikely to achieve its intended objective while unnecessarily affecting many law-abiding Tasmanians, particularly those living and working on rural properties.

Arbitrary classification

The Bill specifically prohibits machetes while leaving many other edged tools unrestricted. This appears to create an arbitrary distinction that is difficult to justify from a public safety perspective.

A machete is only one of many tools capable of inflicting serious injury. Axes, hatchets, tomahawks, brush hooks, slashers, cane knives, billhooks, pruning saws and numerous other agricultural and forestry tools remain lawful despite having similar or greater capacity to cause harm.

As a result, the legislation risks prohibiting one particular tool based largely on its public profile rather than any unique capability. A person intent on committing violence would have access to many readily available alternatives.

If the policy objective is to reduce violent offending, it is difficult to see how prohibiting one specific tool while leaving numerous comparable implements unrestricted will materially improve community safety.

Lack of definition

A further concern is that the Bill does not define what constitutes a "machete". The term appears only in the definition of a prohibited weapon and is not accompanied by any description or objective criteria.

There is no definition based on blade length, blade shape, blade thickness, intended purpose, manufacturer's description, or any recognised Australian or international standard. Nor does the Bill distinguish a machete from other similar tools such as a parang, bolo, cane knife, brush knife, kukri or other long vegetation-clearing implements.

This creates unnecessary legal uncertainty. Criminal legislation should enable an ordinary person to determine with reasonable certainty whether an item they possess is lawful. A prohibition carrying penalties of up to three years' imprisonment should not depend upon an undefined term whose ordinary meaning may vary between individuals, retailers, manufacturers and courts.

At a minimum, the Bill should include a clear and objective definition of what constitutes a machete.

Legitimate rural use

The exemption for agricultural professionals recognises that machetes remain legitimate working tools in agricultural settings. However, the exemption is drafted far too narrowly.

Many Tasmanians own small rural properties or lifestyle farms that are not operated as commercial agricultural businesses but nevertheless require regular vegetation management. Common lawful uses for a machete include:

- clearing overgrown walking tracks and access tracks;
- removing blackberry, gorse and other invasive weeds;
- clearing scrub around fences and boundary lines;
- maintaining firebreaks and bushfire preparedness;
- cutting fallen vegetation after storms;
- clearing access to dams, watercourses and infrastructure;
- maintaining orchards and shelter belts; and
- general property maintenance in areas where powered equipment is impractical or unsafe.

These are ordinary activities undertaken by responsible landowners throughout Tasmania. Many of these people would not fall within the Bill's definition of an "agricultural professional" despite having a genuine and ongoing need for such a tool.

The result is that a commercial farmer may be exempt while a neighbouring landowner performing essentially the same vegetation management on a smaller property could commit a criminal offence simply by possessing the identical tool.

This distinction appears arbitrary and is unlikely to reflect the realities of rural land management.

No permit pathway

A particularly concerning aspect of the Bill is the absence of any mechanism allowing an individual to obtain approval to possess a machete for a legitimate purpose.

The Bill establishes an outright prohibition with only limited statutory exemptions. There appears to be no process by which a landowner, conservation volunteer, bush regenerator, forestry worker outside the agricultural definition, collector or other responsible person can apply for authorisation based on a genuine need.

Many other regulatory schemes allow a permit to be issued where an applicant can demonstrate a lawful purpose and appropriate secure storage. This Bill contains no equivalent provision.

The absence of a permit system means that many responsible Tasmanians with entirely legitimate reasons for possessing a machete will have no lawful avenue to continue doing so.

Suggested amendments

I respectfully suggest that the Bill be amended to:

- include a clear, objective definition of "machete";
- provide a permit or authorisation process allowing individuals to possess a machete where they can demonstrate a genuine lawful purpose and appropriate secure storage;
- broaden the exemption to include legitimate rural land management and property maintenance activities, rather than limiting it to agricultural professionals; and
- reconsider whether prohibiting a single class of edged tool is likely to achieve the intended public safety outcomes given the many comparable tools that will remain readily available.

Conclusion

The objective of reducing violent crime is one that deserves broad community support. However, legislation should be carefully targeted so that it addresses criminal misuse without unnecessarily criminalising ordinary Tasmanians carrying out legitimate activities.

As currently drafted, the Bill places significant restrictions on responsible rural landowners while leaving numerous comparable tools unaffected. It provides no clear definition of what constitutes a machete, no pathway for responsible individuals to obtain authorisation where they have a legitimate need, and no recognition of the many lawful uses of such tools outside commercial agriculture.

I encourage the Government to amend the Bill so that it better balances community safety with the practical needs of rural Tasmania.

Yours Faithfully,

Gerald Verdouw