SUBMISSION

Police Offences Amendment (Knives and Prohibited Weapons) Bill 2026

Consultation Draft

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I am a Tasmanian hunter and land user who relies on knives and edge tools every single day for legitimate work on the property — clearing vegetation, fencing, hunting preparation, and general land management. I strongly support sensible, practical measures to stop knives reaching minors through retail channels and to ensure secure retail displays. However, I firmly and completely oppose the proposed prohibited weapons regime, particularly the classification of machetes and the creation of broad new possession offences. These provisions are unnecessary, poorly drafted, disproportionate, and will primarily harm law-abiding Tasmanians while doing almost nothing to stop actual criminals.

What I Support

I endorse clear restrictions on the sale of knives and edged weapons to people under 18, with straightforward and workable exceptions for genuine needs such as apprenticeships (chef, butcher, farm hand), vocational training, supervised outdoor activities, and property management work. Standard photo ID plus simple evidence of a genuine reason is reasonable and practical.

I also support requirements for retailers to keep knives and edged tools in secure displays or locked storage. Responsible businesses already do this in sensible ways — locked cabinets, behind-counter access, or staff-assisted sales. These measures should remain flexible and business-led rather than buried under prescriptive Commissioner-approved rules that add unnecessary cost and red tape for small and rural stores.

What I Strongly Oppose – The Entire Prohibited Weapons Regime (Division IB – Sections 14E & 14F)

The heart of this bill creates a new category of “prohibited weapon” that includes “a machete” (plus anything later prescribed) and imposes a blanket ban on possession, use, sale, purchase and manufacture, with penalties of up to 100 penalty units or three years in jail. This is wrong on every level.

1. Vague and Overly Broad Definition of “Machete”

The bill provides no statutory definition whatsoever of what constitutes a “machete.” It simply lists “a machete” as a prohibited weapon. This leaves the term to its broad, ordinary meaning — “a large, heavy knife used as a tool or weapon.”

In the real world this is extremely dangerous. A butcher’s cleaver — an essential, heavy, broad-bladed tool used daily in kitchens and butcheries — shares the same general characteristics. Other large fixed-blade knives used in farming, hunting, and land clearing could easily be caught by an expansive interpretation or later prescription. The bill also gives the Commissioner power to prescribe entire classes of items. This vagueness creates real legal uncertainty and the serious risk that legitimate work tools will be treated as prohibited weapons. That is unacceptable.

This vagueness also unnecessarily risks capturing historic and collectible items. Bayonets, other military edged weapons from past conflicts, and family heirlooms with significant sentimental or historical value could easily fall within the ordinary meaning of a “machete” or be caught by future prescription of classes. Law-abiding collectors, descendants of veterans, and those preserving military heritage would face the prospect of criminalisation or the heavy burden of narrow exemptions never designed for them. The existing dangerous articles provisions already provide balanced controls for public carriage without the need for this blunt new category that sweeps in items far removed from current public safety concerns.

2. No Evidence Base Whatsoever

There is simply no credible evidence justifying a new possession ban on machetes or similar tools. Existing dangerous articles laws already cover knives and bladed items in public places. Reid’s Law (2025) already strengthened penalties and introduced wanding. While that has increased detections, there is no clear data showing it has reduced actual knife violence. Studies from other jurisdictions show wanding improves detection but does not reliably reduce violent crime. Criminals who want to use knives for harm already break existing laws — new possession offences on common tools will not stop them.

3. Grossly Disproportionate Penalties

Up to three years in jail or heavy fines for simply possessing what is often a legitimate work or land-management tool is completely disproportionate. This level of punishment belongs to serious offences, not to owning a common rural or trade implement.

4. Attacks on Rights and Basic Fairness

These provisions undermine property rights by suddenly criminalising possession of everyday items without proper transition or compensation. The vague definition violates the fundamental principle that criminal laws must be clear so people know what is prohibited. Broad forfeiture powers — allowing items to be seized and potentially forfeited to the Crown even when not linked to any offence — shift an unfair burden onto ordinary citizens.

5. The Proposed Exemptions Are Completely Ridiculous

The so-called agricultural exemption is narrow, impractical, and frankly absurd. It requires the tool to be used solely for work as an “agricultural professional” AND kept in a securely locked receptacle at all times when not in use. This treats an ordinary land-management tool exactly like a firearm. That comparison is unwarranted and insulting to anyone who actually works the land.

Real farm work, clearing blackberry, fencing, or general property maintenance does not involve locking tools in a safe between every use. The requirement is completely disconnected from how these tools are actually used. Many legitimate users — smallholders, contractors, hunters on private land, and ordinary gardeners — will not even qualify for the exemption. Creating a bad ban and then offering a broken exemption is terrible law-making. The exemption’s requirement to keep the tool in a ‘securely locked receptacle at all times when not in use’ doesn’t just make it impractical — it treats an everyday cutting implement exactly like a firearm. Machetes are tools for cutting vegetation and managing land, not weapons designed to kill at distance. Equating them in this way is policy driven by panic rather than reason, and it will make legitimate daily work on farms and properties farcical or impossible for anyone who doesn’t fit the narrow ‘agricultural professional’ box. Many people doing exactly the kind of land management and feral control work that benefits the state — private landholders and hunters on permitted properties — will not qualify as ‘agricultural professionals’, leaving them suddenly criminalised.

6. Discrepancies Between the Information Sheet and the Actual Bill, Plus Additional Hidden Changes

The Information Sheet presents these changes as modest and targeted. The actual draft Bill is far broader: an extremely wide definition of “sell” that could capture private gifts or transfers; immediate

criminalisation with no transition period; broad forfeiture powers; and extensive delegated regulatory power. These significant elements were not clearly explained to the public.

The bill also contains no transitional provisions whatsoever, meaning existing owners of machetes, similar tools, or historic edged items could be criminalised immediately upon commencement with no grandfathering or grace period. Combined with the broad forfeiture rules that apply even to items not connected to any offence — allowing seizure and potential loss after six months or if the owner cannot satisfy the Commissioner of a “lawful reason” — this creates serious uncertainty and unfairness for responsible citizens holding family heirlooms or long-owned tools. The extremely broad definition of “sell” (which includes offering, agreeing, causing or permitting supply, holding for supply, producing or packaging for supply, and authorising or directing any of those acts) further risks criminalising private gifts, loans, or informal transfers of historic or sentimental items once labelled prohibited weapons. None of these impacts are adequately highlighted in the public Information Sheet.

7. Harm to Law-Abiding Citizens, Regional Tasmania, and Legitimate Industries

These provisions will disproportionately hurt regional and rural Tasmanians, small businesses (hardware stores, farm suppliers, outdoor retailers), tradespeople, butchers, farmers, hunters, and anyone engaged in legitimate land or property work. They create legal uncertainty, compliance costs, and the real risk of over-enforcement against ordinary people simply going about their lawful business. Criminals will continue to ignore the law — responsible users will pay the price.

What Should Be Kept and Improved

The youth sales restrictions and retailer security requirements are reasonable in principle. They should be retained but made practical:

- Expand “genuine reasons” explicitly and clearly to cover outdoor recreational activities, gardening, property and land maintenance, feral animal control, hunting-related work, and structured vocational training or apprenticeships (with sensible pathways for under-16s under supervision).
- Allow retailers real flexibility to decide safe and practical secure display and storage methods that suit their business, rather than imposing rigid Commissioner-approved standards.
- Simplify record-keeping and evidence requirements for sales to 16–17 year olds to standard photo ID plus a straightforward employer, trainer or supervisor declaration or letter. Cut the unnecessary bureaucracy.

Requested Changes

I ask the Government to:

1. Delete the entire new Division IB (Prohibited Weapons – sections 14E and 14F) from the Bill. There must be no possession ban on machetes or similar common edged tools.
2. Retain and improve the youth sales and retailer security provisions along the lines set out above — with clear genuine reasons and genuine flexibility for businesses.
3. Add proper safeguards to any expanded police powers (body-worn cameras where practical, written reasons, proper oversight and review mechanisms).
4. Focus enforcement and policy effort on actual criminal misuse and preventing youth retail access, using and properly resourcing the existing dangerous articles framework rather than creating new, sweeping possession offences.

Better Alternatives

Tasmania would be far better served by:

- Clear public guidance and consistent enforcement of the existing dangerous articles laws, which already provide a workable framework with established lawful excuses.
- Targeted prevention, diversion and support programs that address the real drivers of youth offending and knife-related violence.
- Practical education for retailers and the public on current lawful use and responsibilities.
- If specific concerns about large blades remain, consider narrowly focused measures (such as stronger penalties for offensive carry or use in the commission of crime) rather than blanket possession bans on common tools.

Conclusion

The proposed prohibited weapons provisions are unnecessary, poorly drafted, disproportionate, and will cause real and lasting harm to law-abiding Tasmanians — especially in regional and rural areas — while failing to deliver meaningful improvements in community safety. Existing laws already give police strong tools to deal with dangerous articles in public. This bill's vagueness, breadth, punitive approach, lack of evidence base, and failure to provide transitional arrangements or fair forfeiture processes make it bad law that should be rejected. I urge the Government to remove Division IB entirely and instead pursue practical, evidence-based measures that actually protect the community without criminalising the responsible use of everyday tools or historic family heirlooms.

I am happy to provide further practical examples from real rural and trade use or to discuss any of these matters in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Phillip Bigg
Hunter and Land User
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