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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Police Offences Amendment (Knives and Prohibited Weapons) Bill 2026.

I support practical and evidence-based measures that reduce violent crime and improve community safety. However, I have significant concerns regarding the proposed prohibition of machetes, the obligations imposed on retailers, and the absence of a clear statutory definition of what constitutes a "machete."

Definition of "Machete"

The most significant concern is that the Bill appears to prohibit "machetes" without first providing a precise legal definition.

A criminal offence should be based on legislation that is clear, objective, and capable of consistent interpretation. Without a statutory definition, it is difficult for members of the public, retailers, and law enforcement to determine which items are lawful and which are prohibited.

Questions that arise include:

- What blade length distinguishes a machete from another fixed-blade knife?
- Is blade width, shape, thickness, weight, intended purpose, or marketing relevant?
- Is a heavy butcher's knife with a long rectangular blade considered a machete?
- Would a cane knife, brush hook, or other agricultural cutting tool be included?
- Would a historical short sword, military sidearm, or replica displayed as part of a collection be captured by the definition?
- Would survival knives or large camping knives fall within the prohibition?

These questions demonstrate that "machete" is not a universally understood legal category. Unlike firearms, which have established technical definitions, there is considerable overlap between machetes and many other edged tools.

Without legislative certainty, there is a real risk of inconsistent enforcement across Tasmania.

Retail Obligations

The proposed obligations on retailers also warrant careful consideration.

Retailers require certainty regarding which products are regulated. If the legislation does not clearly define a machete, retailers may struggle to determine which items require secure storage or cannot lawfully be sold.

This creates unnecessary compliance risks for businesses acting in good faith.

Retailers should not bear the burden of interpreting ambiguous legislation where criminal penalties may apply.

If additional obligations are imposed, the legislation should be supported by:

- a precise statutory definition;

- comprehensive guidance issued by Government;
- reasonable implementation timeframes;
- education before enforcement; and
- practical compliance standards that are consistent across all retailers.

Impact on Legitimate Owners

Many people lawfully own large cutting implements for legitimate purposes.

These include:

- agricultural work;
- vegetation management;
- camping and outdoor recreation;
- historical collecting;
- museums;
- theatrical and film productions; and
- cultural or educational displays.

The legislation should clearly distinguish between criminal misuse of a weapon and lawful possession of tools or historical artefacts.

Where exemptions are intended, they should be drafted clearly rather than relying upon administrative discretion.

Evidence-Based Regulation

The objective of reducing knife-related violence is important.

However, regulation should target criminal behaviour rather than creating uncertainty for lawful owners and businesses.

If the Government considers machetes present a unique risk, it should publish the evidence supporting the selection of this particular category rather than other large edged tools.

This would assist stakeholders in understanding why machetes are proposed for prohibition while other tools with similar physical characteristics are not.

Recommendations

I respectfully recommend that the Bill be amended to:

1. Include a precise statutory definition of "machete" based on objective characteristics rather than common usage.
2. Clearly exclude ordinary kitchen knives, butcher's knives, agricultural tools where appropriate, historical artefacts, museum collections, theatrical props, and recognised collector's items.
3. Publish detailed guidance for retailers before the legislation commences.

4. Ensure enforcement powers are based on clearly defined prohibited items rather than subjective interpretation.
5. Undertake further consultation with retailers, collectors, agricultural organisations, and other affected stakeholders before finalising the legislation.

Conclusion

Legislation creating criminal offences should provide certainty, consistency, and clear guidance to both the public and those responsible for enforcing the law.

Without a clear legal definition of "machete," there is a significant risk that the proposed prohibition will create confusion, inconsistent enforcement, and unintended consequences for lawful owners and retailers.

I encourage the Government to refine the Bill to ensure that it achieves its public safety objectives while maintaining legal certainty and protecting legitimate uses of edged tools.

A further point that may strengthen your draft bill is a principle of legislative drafting: criminal laws should be sufficiently clear that an ordinary person can understand what conduct is prohibited. If the Bill leaves the meaning of "machete" to ordinary language or later interpretation, you could argue that it creates uncertainty for retailers, owners, and police alike.

I would also like to ask why "machetes" have been singled out as a prohibited category when many other long-bladed tools—such as cane knives, brush hooks, heavy cleavers, and large butcher's knives—may have similar physical characteristics but legitimate everyday uses. That invites the Government to justify the distinction with evidence rather than assumption.

Kind Regards

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