

and sound equipment. The powers apply to gatherings of 20 or more where amplified music is played at night which “by reason of its loudness and duration and the time at which it is played is likely to cause serious distress to the inhabitants of the locality.” The Bill would:

- apply the powers to music likely to cause distress by its loudness *or* duration *or* the time it was played (rather than all three)
- create new offences of organising a rave and transporting equipment for one
- widen police powers to seize sound equipment and court powers to forfeit it

The Bill has yet to have a second reading and is most unlikely to pass into law this session. Further information on the progress of this bill can be found on the Public Bill List on the Parliament website.¹⁴

Introducing the Bill, Mr Fraser explained why, in his view, the existing powers were insufficient:

The Government have talked tough on antisocial behaviour, and we have seen the introduction of numerous initiatives designed to tackle antisocial behaviour on our streets and in our towns, but what about our rural communities? Farmers in the country have to endure hundreds of trespassers entering their land in convoys of 50 or more vehicles, rubbish strewn over their fields and drug use on their land. There is huge damage to the environment and property. The clean-up and repair costs reach into the thousands. That cannot be a fair way to treat people who are trying to make an honest living. The countryside is not a theme park, and its residents have every right to protection under the law.

I want to make it clear that I and other Members have not been raising this issue in such a persistent way in order to be killjoys, or to deny others pleasure and fun just for the sake of it. I am sure that those who attend these unlicensed events enjoy themselves enormously, but that enjoyment comes at a very high cost to those living in the area. This is not a victimless crime.

There are excellent venues for licensed live music events—High Lodge in Thetford forest, for example—where people can enjoy concerts that are properly and safely organised. Unlicensed music events have nothing to do with the altruistic values of young people. They are hugely profitable to the organisers, who employ a get-rich-quick formula that tramples on the rural economy. Costs are minimised, no tax is paid and there is no regard for anyone, or for anything but profit. Even if no charge is made for people attending a rave, money changes hands for drugs and alcohol. Rural communities must deal with the terrible repercussions, week in, week out. Last week, it was the village of Weeting in my constituency that suffered. This is simply not fair.

The problem lies in the inadequacy of current police powers. The police in Norfolk are working extremely hard to tackle raves. They are gathering intelligence on organisers, and collaborating with neighbouring forces in order to pool resources. However, the police are looking to the Government to allow them to be more proactive. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 gives the police powers to direct those preparing for a rave away from a site, and to remove any vehicles or property that they may have with them. These powers are not enough.

Despite the distress that an unlicensed music event might cause to local residents, or the damage that it might do in rural areas, the existing definition of a “gathering” stands

¹⁴ Bills before Parliament 2007-08, [Criminal Justice \(Raves\) Bill 2007-08](#), accessed 14 October 2008