



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard 28 November 2002

DISCRIMINATION LAW AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (1.44 a.m.): It has been very well documented that the reforms contained in this bill include the amendment of a number of exemptions for non-state schools and religious bodies contained in the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991. As elected representatives, we obviously have a duty to ensure that our communities and indeed the society in which we live are conversant with or understanding of the legislation we have before us. I therefore must thank the vast number of Sunshine Coast residents who raised their concerns and voiced their opinions. I have been involved in numerous briefings and consultative meetings that have identified concerns, and I believe that an agreement that addresses the concerns that have been raised has been broadly accepted.

The well-respected members of the clergy who attended the meetings included Major David Knight of the Salvation Army; Allan Todd from the Churches of Christ; Stephen O'Doherty, CEO of the Christian Schools Association; the Reverend Ian McIver, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland; Reverend David Toscano, State Youth Coordinator for the Baptist Union; Reverend Peter Francis, the Regional Councillor for the Baptist Union; Lutheran Church Moderator Pastor Tim Yajensch; Joe McCorley, Executive Director of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission; Alan Druery, executive officer in the office of Archbishop Bathersby; Catholic Archbishop John Bathersby; and Anglican Archbishop Phillip Aspinall.

We must all remember that one of the fundamental bases of our democracy is the right of the individual to have and, if they wish, to express his or her opinion. While you or I may agree or disagree, we must respect the right of the individual not only to have but also to express their opinion or opinions. I must also sincerely thank all—and there were hundreds—of those very concerned Christians from a vast range of churches and backgrounds who attended the numerous forums, briefings or question-and-answer consultations—whatever you wish to call them. I thank those who sent letters, faxes and emails and made phone calls. I also thank them for remembering us in their prayers. They mentioned this at the various meetings I attended.

I commend both the Attorney-General and the Premier for the process and the outcome achieved on this highly emotive issue. I, too, am happy to say that I regularly pray to Jesus Christ, hoping to become a better person. I do pray for other reasons, too, but mainly to help me through a very complicated world. My God, I believe, will judge me, and He alone has this divine right. Yes, He will judge me on my choice of decisions—maybe not on whether He feels I am right or wrong but on whether I have made a choice for what I truly believe in my heart is for the best, what I believe in my heart is the right decision. My God will not condemn me if I make a decision that is wrong if I have made that decision believing that it was right. My God is a loving God, a forgiving God.

Religion, I believe, is a very good thing. Yes, as a part of God's church we will always have critics. We are humans who have faults, and it is people who are not perfect who make up God's church. I do not push my religion on people, but this morning I feel it is necessary on this issue for me to explain what I believe and feel in my heart.

The main points on this issue that I feel are worth mentioning that have been accepted by our church leaders include that, where appropriate, religious bodies will be able to impose a requirement that an employee be of a particular religion. I believe that this now includes various organisations run on religious grounds or by religious persons, including things such as nursing homes, aged care facilities, hospitals and, of course, schools. This is where employees may need to deliver religious instructions or similar.

In reference to private religious schools and teaching, I must mention that this bill will reinforce this point by amending the section to state that an example of a genuine requirement is employing persons of a particular religion to teach in a school established for students of the particular religion. The repeal of section 42 will not prevent schools operating wholly or mainly for children of a particular sex or religion or for children who have a general or specific impairment as this is expressly provided for elsewhere in the act.

Recently during a radio interview I was involved in, thanks to Christian radio Rhema FM on the Sunshine Coast, some very valid points were raised that I wish to share with the House. Teaching is a position that requires tertiary qualifications. It is an honourable and popular profession—one in fact that in my youth I always aspired to. Truly professional people involved in teaching should not ever flaunt or expose their students to political opinions, their sexuality or sexual preference or even their religious beliefs or non-beliefs, unless of course they are requested to as part of the school's curriculum.

The member for Nicklin said something along the lines that we cannot be all things to all people. I sincerely commend him for these words because, while we could consult on this until the cows come home, there will always be people who disagree. Sooner or later we have to bring this to a head. We have to take this to the people and put it to bed.

Many members have raised very valid points and comments on the issue. One of the saddest aspects of our society is suicide. If one person takes their own life due to discrimination or being unable to understand or come to terms with their sexuality, that is one death too many. I have no doubt we have all heard stories of friends and relatives who are homosexual. I am not frightened to say that I have friends and relatives who are homosexual. As I said earlier, I am not put on this earth to judge them. I can live with them and love them as they can live with and love me. I commend the Attorney-General, the Premier and all those involved in bringing the legislation before the House, and I commend the bill to the House.