



Speech by

**DESLEY SCOTT**

**MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE**

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**DISCRIMINATION LAW AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (12.21 a.m.): It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Discrimination Law Amendment Bill 2002. We humans are all the sum total of our genetic make-up, our experiences from the family in which we grew up, our education, the friends we choose, the media and many other factors. Many people would add another very important influence to this list, and that is their religious faith and spirituality.

Australia is a very diverse society with many cultures, many traditions and many religions. The strength of our country lies in our tolerance and acceptance of all our differences and the laws of equity and justice which should be designed to give all a fair go. In recent decades, we have seen many changes in our society—not all, I might add, for the better. I am personally saddened at the break-up of marriage and deeply saddened to see children in homes where they may not be cared for and loved. There are many stresses in this modern world, and in many cases real commitment is sadly lacking within personal relationships.

I have been fortunate to be married to one man, my childhood sweetheart, for 37 years. Twenty minutes ago I would have been able to say that it is my wedding anniversary. However, the image of a father going off each day as the breadwinner with wife at home caring for the family is long gone. There are so many variations to the community concept of family these days that it is imperative that our laws offer the same protection that previously was reserved for what was known as the traditional family.

As I have served the people in my electorate, with all its diversity, over many years it is clearly the case that the traditional family is in the minority. That is not to say that I do not wish for more commitment, love and understanding between partners. I am sure we would all wish for that.

I want to acknowledge the role that many of my churches and other community groups play in a positive way to foster healthy family relationships and also to offer good balanced counselling which can often bring partners closer together. I welcome, too, the role that many of my churches play in helping to set good wholesome boundaries for children and young people. However, why should we not expect that all children and partners, in whatever form that might take, should be given the same rights at law? In a country such as Australia, and in particular our state of Queensland, we should accept nothing less.

I believe strongly that Christians and other religious groups should offer tolerance, acceptance and freedom to others, just as they seek tolerance, acceptance and freedom for themselves. When Jesus Christ walked on this earth, His ministry was to the downtrodden, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the lepers, the outcasts of society and, yes, to the rulers and religiously pious. But it was mainly the poor and oppressed who heard Him gladly. They were the ones who felt they had much to be forgiven.

I stand here today as a mother and as a Christian who chose a Christian school for our three sons. I am glad they have grown into fine young men who show acceptance and care for others and who are sensitive and treat others with respect.

I have attended many meetings and briefings on these issues, including the combined meeting of church leaders on Monday evening and I understand the deeply held issue of personal faith being a lifestyle and a relationship. I would like to thank the Premier and the Attorney-General for listening with understanding and being prepared to spend so much of their valuable time to ensure that this

legislation is brought before the House with a framework acceptable to our major Christian bodies. I believe most faiths have expressed acceptance of the legislation as it now stands. Of course, I am mindful that we also legislate to accommodate other religious faiths such as Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist schools.

I would also like to commend the church leaders who spoke so passionately and openly of their faith and their wish to retain the special qualities of education which attract parents to enrol their children at their schools. I believe that is their right. I have attended many very moving awards ceremonies in recent weeks at such schools as St Francis' College at Crestmead, Calvary Christian College at Carbrook and tonight at Mary Fields Primary. Groves Christian College at Kingston is a fine Christian college in my electorate whose principal and teachers care deeply for the families in my area and truly do a wonderful job. I also have close ties to the Brisbane Adventist College in the member for Mansfield's electorate. They all offer not only a fine education but that extra ingredient of the Christian ethic which I believe in its pure form would make the world a better place.

However, I wish to appeal to Christian people to exercise tolerance and acceptance to those who choose a different lifestyle and share different values. We are a multifaith country, but we should also respect the right of people to have no religious belief if that is their choice.

We should not confuse the term 'gay' with being a predator or abuser of children. Sadly, sexual predators and abusers come in all forms. A recent case before the courts in Victoria involved my young nephew who is now 30 years of age. He was groomed by a teacher in late primary and then into high school. The teacher acted as his mentor but, in reality, sexually abused him over a period of four years. The perpetrator of that abuse is now in prison, leaving a wife and several young children. My nephew and his family are trying to put their lives back together again.

I can sadly report that the abuse happened in a Christian school by a well-respected young teacher who later married and had a family of his own. My son Glenn and his close friend Brandie remained close to Jamie through this horrendous ordeal of disclosure and police investigation. When Jamie had reached the end of his ability to cope and felt he could not go on, Glenn would go and stay with him to support him and make sure that he made it through. I am really proud of the care they showed through it all. These are such weighty issues. We are dealing with human lives and when a young gay person suicides for lack of love and acceptance, as we have heard during this debate, I believe that is an indictment on our society.

These laws are giving our state a framework in which we offer protection and respect to human beings, no matter who they are or what their personal beliefs may be. The laws have nothing to do with advocating lifestyle. For those who are of the Christian faith, I strongly believe God does not have a hierarchy of sins where he holds some to be more grievous than others. No sexual immorality is worse than not loving your fellow man and being critical and hateful towards others. We may not like another's actions, but the New Testament message is love to God and love to our fellow man.

In conclusion, this is legislation which has required tremendous sensitivity, listening and some adjustments to accommodate some of our interest groups. By this we hope to create a fairer society—one which recognises our differences and allows freedom for our religious schools to operate but also encourages greater tolerance and understanding. I want to congratulate our great Premier and Attorney-General, who have my greatest admiration, and their hardworking staff. I commend the bill to the House.