



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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DISCRIMINATION LAW AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (9.09 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Discrimination Law Amendment Bill 2002 that has been introduced without any true public consultation processes, which this government is so keen to tell everyone is one of its priorities before it tables any legislation. Why? This was always going to be contentious legislation. While this bill has sat on the table for 22 days I, and every other honourable member, have received hundreds of letters, emails and phone calls from people supporting both sides of the equation. The overwhelming majority were against the legislation on many grounds, not just in relation to teaching in religious schools.

Before I get into the heavier and more contentious parts of the bill, I would like to put on record my disgust at the way the amendments have come so late into the hands of not only the opposition but members of One Nation and the Independents. Agreement on the amendments was, we were told, reached last night, but most of us did not get to see them until this afternoon. Yes, the churches may have seen them, but the vast number of the people who wrote to me from the community have not had any time to consider them and nor were they going to be allowed to.

The Premier stood in the House and said that an agreement was finally reached with the churches late last night. The responses I have since received, through phone calls and letters from them, confirm that there was such an agreement. Although most said that they had come away feeling a little better about the bill, they still conveyed that they would prefer that the full exemption remained. All maintained that the lack of consultation at the outset and the subsequent consultation at the 11th hour was 'an unsatisfactory process'. How can the Premier claim he has a mandate for the tightening of antidiscrimination laws when it is stated in the explanatory notes that there had been no consultation? The government did not even consult such groups as churches and independent school organisations, let alone the community at large, until it was forced to. Once again the government has introduced legislation by stealth to try to avoid public scrutiny in its never-ending quest to appeal to minority groups. Let me tell the government one thing: this did not go down well in the electorate. If it persists to pander to the wishes of minority groups at the expense of the general community, the time will come when the electorates will retaliate.

The credibility of the government is at stake over this legislation. They cannot say they will do consultation and then not go ahead and do it. Their credibility is at risk and, as shown through the introduction of this legislation, it has little regard for religious teachers, ranging from Christian to Jewish to Muslim teachers, in schools who regard the legislation as an imposition on their institution's secular values.

The Premier has been quoted as saying that the debate over this legislation in relation to religion hinges on a definition of that religion. Most religious organisations feel that this legislation is a direct challenge not only to their religious beliefs and values but also to the independence of the schools. It is no wonder then that the consultation process for this legislation appears to have only been between the government and the groups that will benefit from it. No-one in this country would object to all interested parties being consulted and I would say that would include the gay and transgender community—the whole lot. Every other element of the community should have been consulted, but they were not. This is a country that prides itself on personal freedoms such as freedom of speech and religious freedom. This government denied the majority of the Queensland population a chance to express a view.

The letters of concern that have come into my office were not form letters, as one government member stated. They were from families, teachers, homosexuals and every manner of people who make up any given segment of a community. They were from the highly educated and the lowly educated. They came from all manner of people.

I believe that any conflicts between what a teacher teaches and what a teacher practises is hypocrisy and this legislation is hypocritical. How can teachers perform their duties properly if they do not believe in what they are teaching? The people who send their children to Christian schools often go without, especially in country communities, so that their children can be taught in the beliefs that they themselves believe. I was at this point going to read some of the many letters from both sides of the argument, but others have done so and in order to save some time for other members to make a contribution I will refrain. It is mentioned many times in those letters that the writers—those opposed to the legislation—do not hate homosexuals. What they dislike is the act. As they said to me, their Christian belief is 'love the individual, not the act'.

I have tried very hard to educate myself further with regards to the homosexual lifestyle. I do in fact have friends who are homosexual and I know quite a few people who are bisexual. I spoke to several homosexuals and bisexuals. I accessed web sites. I watched documentaries and I read books. Of those I spoke to, one only had absolutely no attraction to women. Five claimed they were bisexual. When I asked them whether they would actually class themselves as homosexual, they said, 'No, we just like both sexes.' When asked when they had realised they were bisexual, two said they had been approached by a paedophile at the ages of 11 and 13 respectively; the others had been approached by a homosexual adult when they were in their late teens or early 20s. When asked why they accepted the advances they said that they were just curious. All bar one of the group I spoke to said they hoped to get married and settle down and believed they could stop their homosexual activity. That is why I and many others believe for many it is a lifestyle choice—for many, not all.

In my search for knowledge I found that it is little wonder there is great consternation in the community, not just the churchgoers but most people in the community. You, me and any child can get onto the Internet and obtain the Gay Liberation Front manifesto and read its contents. Maybe all homosexuals do not support this manifesto, but I have yet to hear anyone oppose it. We only have to look through it—it is not a large document—to see several mentions that 'we aim at the abolition of the family' and 'we are not in fact being idealistic to aim at abolishing the family'. It says those sorts of things quite often. It has quite a number of disturbing paragraphs. Even to a non-religious person, but a person who supports the foundation stone of our society—the family—this document and what it portrays is quite frightening. Homosexuals must realise that it is they themselves who allow this sort of information to be put into the public arena and it is this information that has created disquiet amongst those who value family life. I mention these things so that members will try to understand why people have the views they do. I do not condone homosexuality, but I endeavour to be understanding of all persons involved.

The Premier is adamant that in this current crisis with worldwide terrorism no prejudice should be shown. On the one hand, he is asking the community to be tolerant, yet he attempts to push through legislation that is an insult to those teaching the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths in schools. There has been no tolerance in this House for points of view other than this Labor government's point of view. This bill totally disregards the majority view of communities concerning freedom of choice in education. That is what this bill is about—choice, the choice to have our children brought up in the doctrine we believe in. Our children are not stupid and they pick up quickly on any hypocrisy between what they are being taught and what their teacher believes. They often idolise their teachers and look up to them and so there has to be a concern for people in Christian schools.

The government has in this instance let the electorate down. The government has made up its mind to introduce legislation that will expand antidiscrimination laws without proper community consultation. Regardless of what the community feels, this bill will go through because the government has the numbers, so why was there such a problem? Why could the community not have been asked about and informed of all of the amendments?

I would like now to address the section about reregistering birth certificates. I have a friend who is currently undergoing the change, as he calls it. At the moment he lives his life as the woman he hopes to become and will undergo the operation in the not-too-distant future. But do not judge him. He has endeavoured to convey to me the anguish his life has been. I do not understand, because I have not lived his life. But I also do not condemn him. I will support him through his ordeal because he is a friend, and I will always be his friend. His wife and I are very close friends and she remains very loyal to him because she believes in her vows. She is in her sixties. There is no doubt that she and he have suffered intolerance from others around them. The man has, according to the professionals—and I am not one to judge them or say they are wrong, because I do not have the knowledge—a genuine genetic basis for his desire to become a woman. He has asked me to support the amendment for the

change to his birth certificate. I have tried very hard to see the point of view put forward for having the birth certificate changed, but I cannot.

The birth certificate is a record which, as far as I am aware, is a private document obtainable only by the person himself or herself. I believe it should always remain as a permanent record that a person is male or female. However, I readily accept that an additional entry could be made noting the date of change. It should always remain as the actual record of the birth.

There are a lot of speakers to follow me tonight and I will not take up too much time. They appear to be the two most contentious issues. The overwhelming view of the community that I represent is that they are opposed to this legislation. I have at all times endeavoured to represent their views in this parliament, and I do so tonight. I oppose this bill.