



Speech by

Vicky Darling

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Hansard Tuesday, 18 August 2009

ADOPTION BILL

Ms DARLING (Sandgate—ALP) (3.43 pm): I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. I find myself so flabbergasted by the conspiracy theories of the member for Mudgeeraba that I was temporarily speechless. This afternoon I am pleased to support the Adoption Bill 2009. Previous government speakers have discussed the contemporary reform introduced by this bill to widen eligibility to lodge expressions of interest beyond married couples. Opening eligibility to de facto couples who have been in a committed relationship for at least two years is a change that recognises the changing attitudes to family life. However, the bill also makes other changes to the eligibility criteria that are worthy of note.

A couple will be eligible to lodge an expression of interest in adoption only if the female partner is not pregnant, couples are not undergoing fertility treatment and have not undergone fertility treatment within the previous six months before they lodge their expression of interest, and they do not have custody of a child aged less than one year or a child who has been in their custody for less than one year—other than children of whom the person is an approved foster carer under the Child Protection Act 1999. These criteria relate to matters that are already taken into account by the department when selecting a person to be a prospective adoptive parent for a child.

The criteria are indicators of a person's current ability to focus their attention primarily on an adopted child for at least the first 12 months of the placement. We know through research that it is a critical time for an adopted child and their adoptive parents, and again these criteria go to Adoption Services Queensland's unwavering dedication to the needs of the child. This does require prospective adoptive parents to understand that it is the child requiring adoption and that child's needs that is the focus of adoption decisions. But prospective adoptive parents can be assured that by including these criteria the bill provides an expression of interest register that only contains the names of people who are immediately ready to proceed through the assessment and adoption processes. The register will be kept at a manageable size and will more accurately represent the people who are committed to participating in the adoption process at a particular time. As such, the register will remain open indefinitely rather than open periodically. The fee for joining the register will also be removed to ensure that parents are not penalised for opting in and out as their situation changes. These changes will make it easier for people to consider adoption as an alternative in the long run and ensure the register contains only those couples ready and able to proceed with an adoption should they be found suitable for a child requiring adoption.

I consider myself very blessed and very lucky to have two beautiful children. I have never had to personally experience the struggle with infertility. I want to particularly thank some people very close to me who have helped my understanding of the issues as I have considered the Adoption Bill. First of all, I am the very proud aunty of a beautiful niece who my brother and sister-in-law adopted from Romania just over 12 years ago. It was very interesting to go on the journey with them both as they prepared for their beautiful little girl to arrive. It was an eye-opener for me to see the real connection with her culture from Romania and how important it is to talk to her about her country of origin and her culture, and they have been able to plan—hopefully—a return to Romania at some time. It was part of the international adoption program that they prepared themselves in a lot of ways for adopting a child from overseas. It was also fairly traumatic, as the rules of other countries changed along the way. They were lucky to have a beautiful 3½-

year-old daughter. They were expecting a six-month-old daughter, but the rules of Romania changed whilst they were on the waiting list. I very much understand the painful wait for a child when a couple has decided that that is what they would like to complete their family. We love her dearly. My children are absolutely besotted with their big cousin. I thank my family for helping me understand about the adoption process.

I also want to thank the beautiful member for Brisbane Central, because she is a good friend and colleague. One only needs to set foot in the Grace family household to see the absolute joy of that family. They are wonderful people to be around. I still have to take the member for Brisbane Central up on a promise of one of those beautiful Italian dishes that she makes, but she and her husband absolutely adore their family situation. However, we did have the opportunity to talk about the decisions leading up to that and the frustrations of the register and the waiting list. I listened to the member's wonderful contribution. I hope all members of this House take the opportunity to read the contribution by the member for Brisbane Central. It is heartfelt. It is real. She has actually walked the walk, not just talked the talk. It should give people a bit more of an understanding of some of the issues that confront the members of this place.

I also want to acknowledge some very brave couples who presented themselves to the committee investigating altruistic surrogacy. They told some very personal stories of their infertility. I will leave my comments on surrogacy for when that bill is introduced into this place. Of course, adoption is one of the options for consideration when faced with infertility. By the time you reach the decision to go ahead with surrogacy with someone who loves and supports you, my word you have been on a tremendously emotional journey. You tend to have started with the realisation of your infertility, tried different ways of falling pregnant and then moved through to trying adoption. It seems that every time a door is slammed you are left with people whose desire for a family and to care for and nurture a child is very strong. I thank those people for being so brave as to really lay bare their personal lives and tell us their stories.

I also refer to all of the people who took the time to write to members of parliament. I think every member of parliament received various correspondence. That correspondence showed us that there is absolutely no black and white. There is no classic scenario for adoption. Everybody is different. Everybody has feelings. As the member for Brisbane Central said earlier, this bill does achieve a balance. A lot of people's needs have to be taken into consideration but always paramount are the rights of the child.

I also thank the member for Albert, who, when she was the minister, put in a lot of work, research and heartfelt time listening to people with regard to adoption reform.

Ms Grace: She did a great job.

Ms DARLING: A brilliant job. I also thank the current minister for bringing this bill into the parliament. I heartily support the bill.