



Speech by

Dr Alex Douglas

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

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CARERS (RECOGNITION) AMENDMENT BILL AND SENIORS RECOGNITION (GRANDPARENTS PROVIDING CARE) BILL

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (9.15 pm): This is a debate the government does not really want to have. Quite a deal of discussion and argy-bargy has been going on to either delay, modify or temper the debate. Primarily it began with the Seniors Recognition (Grandparents Providing Care) Bill 2010, introduced by the member for Burdekin, Mrs Rosemary Menkens, as a private member's bill. The shadow minister has spoken at length on both her own bill and now the government's bill in response.

I attended the briefings given by the minister, the member for Inala, and other briefings, and I thank all for their patience and sensitivity. I was quite surprised by the government's response and inability to lift itself above the issues of process and ideology. I do not doubt its professionalism and intellect. What I do doubt is an appreciation of the experience, worldliness, pragmatism and, in good measure, sportsmanship.

Before moving on, I would actually like to explain that last descriptor. As has been mentioned ad nauseam here in the House, in relation to many bills there is bipartisan support for decisions and a practical progression to a workable result. On some points, ideology and stubborn opposition and representing one's constituency can prevent that process. True sportsmanship is what we teach our children. Hopefully, the outcome is that they will accept the umpire's decision with good grace, shake one another's hands and applaud those who are successful.

I am still not certain that on this bill I am seeing that from the responsible minister or the department. I remain concerned that the parallel member, the member for Algester, did do a 'pass the parcel' on this bill. It is a hard one. But like all difficult problems, the solution will have to be worked through. The solution is multifaceted.

I am a family GP, and this issue is a very real problem for families now and certainly in the past as well. Over 50 per cent of all marriages end in divorce, and 40 per cent of those occur within 10 years. Children are in a very vulnerable situation due to the issue of mixed marriages and subsequent financial hardship, parents working, teenage and peer group issues that parents do not have time to deal with and the dislocation from relatives.

Personally, I have put it to the department and the minister that I will give them a 100-plus examples of why we need the bill that is proposed tonight by the member for Burdekin, the Seniors Recognition (Grandparents Providing Care) Bill, and not the government's Carers (Recognition) Amendment Bill. These are real-life examples and worthy of hearing. I have been politely ignored. I believe that the member for Burdekin was treated in a similar manner.

All the major points have been well made regarding the details of each bill. The key government amendment is clause 5. It defines a grandparent carer as 'the grandparent is the primary care-giver and the decision-maker for the child'. That is the defining point of the bill. As has been made mentioned before, that cuts out most grandparents who are rearing their grandchildren under informal

family arrangements and, critically, all grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren through the child protection system when they do not have guardianship.

I have extensive experience of this issue. Not only is the government amendment disturbing; it will leave most grandparents in a hopeless situation. This bill was offering them hope in their truly precarious situation. That is crucially their issue. But what of their children and grandchildren? It does not offer them a solution and they have been consigned to a future either in legal limbo with relative carers—that is, those with Family Court orders—or guardianship through Child Safety.

The stated purpose of the LNP bill is to inscribe a charter giving grandparents providing care official status as immediate family members and recognition for their efforts. It provides for a legislative framework to implement these aims. The Bligh Labor government's bill offers grandparents none of these aspirational ideals due to the critical definition of grandparent carer.

I do not believe in views that state that when one has children only then can one understand both what responsibilities of parents are and what parents do indeed feel and what sacrifices need to be made for their children and their grandchildren. I am beginning to think that, after dealing with this current government and by virtue of my own increasing age whereby I am facing the situation where we could potentially have grandchildren, my views may need to change. The government position is untenable and has a blind adherence to an ideological position that primarily addresses carers providing care to those with disabilities and those who are infirm, aged or incapacitated. With respect, these areas are not just a bit different; they are poles apart. These are not trivial matters; these are children we are being asked to help here. They have names, homes, grandparents and families who often selflessly want to do nothing more than love and care for them.

I put it to the minister and her government that the carers bill that forms one part of this cognate debate does not do what it says it should do, and that is truly define a grandparent as a carer, because it adds the qualification to that word and, in doing so, it destroys most of the goodwill that goes with it. I, too, have read all of the stories from parents, grandparents, journalists, Peter Beattie's personal stories and a variety of stories which in part have been related here today and certainly in many of the articles that have been written. None of these stories have relevance to the Carers (Recognition) Act, and nor should they. I realise it is hard to understand what grandchildren see in their grandparents and vice versa to some who want to try to put everything into words and structure. There are too many words that convey that special component contributed to by grandparents. Those sentiments have been effectively conveyed by the shadow minister and the grandparents bill is testament to a true understanding of what is needed. It really is deserving of all our support for all the right reasons.

The Carers (Recognition) Bill was introduced by the LNP in 2008. It was passed under Labor with a significant amendment that weakened the bill by removing the requirement to consult with carers and consider the Carers Charter when making decisions affecting carers. To add grandparents to this amended bill in the manner dictated by Labor is just too offensive. It defeats common sense and defies community expectations. It also demonstrates a lack of knowledge, a lack of insight and a lack of sensitivity towards grandparents. I urge members to support the LNP bill and disregard the government's bill.