



Speech by

Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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SURROGACY BILL; FAMILY (SURROGACY) BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (9.51 pm): I would like to premise my contribution to this cognate debate by stating to the House that the family unit is the originating source for how an individual interacts with others. Essentially, this ideal provides the framework and direction for how one will behave in future friendships and relationships. For children, it is proven that metacognitive social development can be intrinsically linked to the role modelling of the direct carer—in most cases the parent or parents. This cognate debate combines the issues of altruistic surrogacy under different legislative amendments, the Surrogacy Bill 2009, introduced by the honourable Attorney-General, and the Family (Surrogacy) Bill 2009, introduced by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. For ease of reference, particularly given the similar nature of the legislative amendments that have been proposed, I intend to address each bill individually, beginning with the Surrogacy Bill introduced by the Bligh government.

Firstly, can I say that this bill is the start of the socialist reform agenda. They start with same-sex parenting and one begins to wonder where they will go and when they will stop. Children are not a commodity. You cannot just expect to make them and shoot them out left, right and centre for the sake of some selfish right for children. Next they will be arguing that we should have selfish rights to choose the eyes, colour and build of our children.

The bill seeks to decriminalise altruistic surrogacy and accommodates this action with the provision to legally transfer a child born as a result of altruistic surrogacy arrangements from the birth mother to the intended parents. The decriminalisation of altruistic surrogacy is a reform that I am happy to support in this House. As legislators, it is paramount that we reflect the attitude and general consensus of society. It is an unfortunate situation where some heterosexual couples are unable to naturally conceive due to medical circumstances on either partner's behalf. The medical advancement in the area of artificial reproductive technology should be embraced and responsibly adopted in society.

As a father of two girls and a third child on the way, I understand and appreciate the miracle and blessing one experiences when a child is born. I have a great deal of empathy for those heterosexual couples who are unfortunately unable to naturally conceive a child and I am liberally minded to legally allow these people to have an opportunity to make use of the science that can assist in this area. I support the provisions of this bill that decriminalise altruistic surrogacy, but I do not support the extension of this legislative amendment to same-sex couples and single parents.

My brother was married once. He and his wife lost their first child to an unknown complication and tried again. One year after the birth of their second child my brother's wife packed up and shipped out expecting, by some way of a mother's natural affection for her baby, to take the child with her. My brother considered what was in the best interests of the child and has now been the proud single parent of his daughter for some seven years. So I know through my brother's experience how hard it is to be a single dad. My brother never would have chosen that for his daughter, but that is the unfortunate situation that was dealt to him. But his circumstance was different. He did not wake up one morning and decide he wanted to have a baby, expecting he would stay single. He was married and the marriage did not work, but he understood and appreciated before any of this that it was in the best interests of a child to have a

mother and a father at home. It took my brother a while to find someone else but he has now found someone else and he has a family as a dad and a stepdad.

As legislators we must consider what is in the best interests of the child. The Family (Surrogacy) Bill 2009, introduced by the honourable Deputy Leader of the Opposition, strikes a balance between protecting the rights of the child and introducing social reform into this House. The key difference between the government and the opposition's legislative amendment bill introduced into this House is the recognition of the right of a child to have both a male and a female role model as parents.

There are several lobby groups which have no doubt contacted all members with respect to these bills. Unfortunately, the government has coupled the decriminalisation of altruistic surrogacy with same-sex parenting issues. These are two very separate and distinct debates and the opposition recognises this fact. Again, this is another major decision not taken to the people of Queensland at the state election. And we wonder why the government did not take this issue to the election. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that in the latest Galaxy poll 86 per cent of Australians believe that what the government is doing tonight is not in the best interests of children.

The Bligh government's own legislative agenda on parenting issues can be described as inconsistent at best. This is another example of a crisis-management government without a strong and consistent policy platform to govern for all of Queensland. Only last year we saw legislation introduced regarding adoption that excluded same-sex couples and single parents. To save face and restore its left wing credentials, the government has introduced this legislation, which decriminalises altruistic surrogacy, including for same-sex couples and single parents. So to clarify the government's position without all the spin, it is all right for same-sex couples and single parents to explore altruistic surrogacy for parenting options, but these same people are not permitted under state law—only introduced into this House and passed by his House last year—to adopt. For the benefit of the people of Queensland, can the Attorney-General explain to me the difference for the child in each of these cases? In his second reading speech the Attorney-General stated—

This government is committed to the freedom and autonomy of the individual.

Of course, that is when it suits its argument of the day. That was not the case in the Adoption Bill 2009 and more recently in the Criminal Organisation Bill 2009. The government cloaks itself as a party of civil liberties, but only when it suits it. In this case, the government's bill is nothing more than cheap political opportunism to cosy up to the Left.

To me, this issue is quite clear. There is enough anecdotal evidence to justify the concern that children who do not have a male and female role model as parents have an increased risk of developing identity, social and behavioural issues in the future. The subject of same-sex parenting is and should be a separate debate. I personally believe that all unborn children have a fundamental right to have a male role model as a father and a female role model as a mother.

With regard to the family unit as a social construct, I would like to make the following key points. Particular concern has been documented by many researchers regarding children who grow up in single-parent families. Sarah Wise from the Australian Institute of Family Studies released a research paper titled *Family structure, child outcomes and environmental mediators* in January 2003.

This paper looked at several issues facing the family unit and the effect of family diversity, namely parental role modelling and single and same-sex parent families in modern society. The family structure is considered paramount in the long-term development of a child. Family factors that significantly contribute to this development include family cohesion, sibling relationships, parental mental health and parental style and discipline methods.

Another academic article on this issue was written by Mr Bill Muehlenberg and published in the *National Observer* in 2002 titled *The case for the two-parent family*. Mr Muehlenberg states—

A study of Australian primary school children from three family types (married heterosexual couples, cohabitating heterosexual couples and homosexual couples) found that in every area of educational endeavour (language, mathematics, social studies, sport, class work, sociability and popularity, and attitudes to learning), children from married heterosexual couples performed better than the other two groups.

The study concludes with these words—

Married couples seem to offer the best environment for a child's social and educational development.

Moreover, it seems that evidence is mounting to suggest that the presence of fathers strongly impacts on the educational performance and intelligence of children. While some people may argue that any anecdotal evidence to support an argument on this subject is futile, there is a lack of academic studies on the effects of same-sex parenting on children due to the fact that this issue is one that is relatively new. There have, however, been many studies on the effects on a child on the deprivation of a mother or father in the case of a single parent relationship. These studies and their findings should also be considered as relevant for studying the effect on a child that is raised by homosexual parents.

Professor Lyn Wardle wrote in her article published in 1997 that even studies in favour of homosexual parenting acknowledge some data that illustrates that homosexual parenting may be harmful. Studies in the United States have shown an increase of frequency of occurrences of anxiety, sadness, hostility, defensiveness and inhibitions amongst children of homosexual parents, particularly amongst boys. While I personally know and have nothing against homosexual people—in fact have some friends—I am deeply concerned about the rights of a child to have heterosexual parents. This fundamental right is denied with this legislation. The interests of the child should be paramount when laws to this effect are considered.

Like most members of this great place, today I received a letter from the Most Reverend John Bathersby. I quote from that letter a direct quote from Pope Benedict made two days ago on 8 February. The direct quote from the letter from the Pope says—

The best chance children have of developing properly is found in a family because of the uniquely complementary roles played by the husband and wife...they need to dwell, grow and live with both parents, because the maternal and paternal figures complement one another in the education of children and the formation of their personality and identity. It is important then, that everything possible is done to ensure they grow up in a united and stable family.

I note those opposite will be voting by way of conscience. Can I suggest to those members opposite who profess to be followers of the Pope that they read the words of the Pope first and then follow their conscience. For ease of reference for those members opposite I table a copy of the letter from the Reverend John Bathersby. I hope those opposite have a chance to read it prior to voting on this piece of legislation.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 10 February 2010, from Most Rev. John A Bathersby, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane to Mr Bleijie, Member for Kawana, in relation to the Surrogacy Bill 2009 [1715].

I have been contacted by many constituents with respect to this issue and the respective legislation introduced by the government and the opposition. The general consensus from those who have contacted my office is for a far more conservative approach than what the government has offered this parliament. In fact, the only lobbying I had to support the government's bill was numerous form letters, standard letters, all being machined out of the same place, all having spelt my name the same way incorrectly on each of the 20 letters.

The opposition's legislation is far more balanced. The social engineering the Bligh government is forcing on the Queensland electorate has been met with widespread criticism. The Family (Surrogacy) Bill introduced by the honourable Deputy Leader of the Opposition achieves the objectives of the bipartisan committee's recommendations. The key recommendations included that altruistic surrogacy be decriminalised in Queensland subject to a regulatory framework; the government's role should include implementing legislative reform, including a mechanism to transfer legal parentage; altruistic surrogacy arrangements should be unenforceable under state law; births are reregistered after the transfer of legal parentage for a child; and children have access to the original birth certificates when they turn 18 years of age. There was no mention of same-sex couples or single parents in the report's recommendations. The fact that this omission from the recommendations of the committee's report was disregarded again questions the role and structure of the committee system in this House and the accountability of government in Queensland.

As the Premier indicated in her contribution today, the reality with modern science is that we can as legislators assist couples such as, and I will use the example given by the Premier, Michael and Kirsty. Kirsty was not able to carry children to full term. I cannot imagine what that would be like as my wife has been blessed with uncomplicated pregnancies. Under the opposition's bill Michael and Kirsty would have access to altruistic surrogacy. This legislation would assist Michael and Kirsty to finally have the family that they have been so longing for. I support this because Michael and Kirsty, in the Premier's definition, are a male and a female naturally wanting to have children but because of some medical condition cannot. Why could the Premier not stop there and cover the couples who genuinely want children but for some medical assessment cannot?

The bill goes another step and allows singles and same-sex couples to use surrogacy. With great respect to the Premier's contribution, her arguments are flawed. Unlike Michael and Kirsty, two men and two women are not naturally designed to procreate. The Premier claims that all this is happening in our electorates as we speak. That is what the Premier said this afternoon. I can say to the Premier that I can all but guarantee her that there are not two males in my electorate sitting in a doctor's chair being artificially inseminated as I speak. Men cannot conceive and carry children. It is commonsense. The Premier brings into the fray the two women who can conceive; but men cannot. It was a tricky way to do it. As I said, the argument is quite flawed.

I always enjoy listening to the member for Chatsworth in this place—today was no exception with his absurd contribution. He trivialised this matter by suggesting that a child would much rather live with same-sex parents than in an environment where the father comes home and bashes the wife every night. Those opposite denied it when the member for Gympie mentioned that in his speech tonight, but they were the words from the member for Chatsworth: that if one asked a young child whether they would rather live with

a homosexual couple or in a situation where the father is verbally or physically abusive to the mother that they would choose the homosexual relationship. Any child in Queensland or Australia would, of course, want out of that situation. Surely, though, the member is not suggesting that we take away the child from the mother who is the victim of that relationship and place the child in the care of a same-sex couple. I would suggest that what is in the best interests of the child would be to throw the father in jail and let the child and mother live in peace. Or was the honourable member suggesting that those living in same-sex environments do not squabble and somehow offer a better family environment than a heterosexual couple?

The member for Keppel and other honourable members opposite have linked our opposition to single parents with single mothers who have lost their partner through war or for whatever other reason. I submit that these people did not have a choice. We are not suggesting that single parents make bad parents. No-one has said that today in this place. To say in this place otherwise is offensive, particularly for those single parents who have not had a choice with respect to the single relationship, be it the result of death or some other reason.

We need to ensure that as legislators we do what we can to give every child the best start in life, which is with a mother and a father as parental role models. People should not flippantly make babies the guinea pigs of Labor's social experiment. I condemn the Surrogacy Bill that was introduced by the Attorney-General. It does not take into consideration the best interests of the child. However, I do commend the Family (Surrogacy) Bill introduced by the opposition, which will allow heterosexual couples with genuine medical reasons, not social ones, to have children. Having children is not a right; it is a responsibility. We do not have the right to force this upon children. I pray that the conscience of those members opposite is far stronger than any fear factor enlisted by the state Premier.