



Speech by
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 30 November 2011

CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS BILL

 **Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (9.24 pm): I rise proudly tonight to support this bill. I do so after listening to all sides of the debate. I have had many emails, letters and phone calls from people who are not supporting the bill but mostly, I am proud to say, from people who are supporting the bill—many of them my constituents and many of them in the gallery tonight. I recognise members of the LGBT community in the gallery tonight.

I was lucky enough to be part of the Legal Affairs, Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services Committee's public hearings into the Civil Partnerships Bill. I want to start by quoting the Very Reverend Dr Peter Catt, chair of the Social Responsibilities Committee of the Anglican Church. He stated—

One of the strengths of this bill is that it does not pretend to be interfering with marriage. It is not using any marriage-like terms. The way in which people register the partnerships is different to the marriage ceremony. I think it does a good job of keeping that distinction clear.

I agree with the Very Reverend Dr Peter Catt.

In listening to all of the debate, I want to be honest here tonight because I think honesty is often the best policy. Let us be honest. Opposition to this bill is not about the rights of children—as some people submitted to the committee—to be born to a married man and woman. This bill will give the ability for non-married couples of opposite sex with children to enter into civil partnerships. If we take that argument, it has to be better to have that recognised than to not have the option of registering that relationship. So it is not about opposite sex people and the rights of children.

Let us be honest. Why would people be upset if this bill is mimicking marriage if they think marriage is so fantastic for society? It has to be better for couples to be able to register their relationship than to remain unregistered or have to prove a de facto relationship. It has nothing to do with the sanctity of marriage. Unlike me, who has been happily married for 26 years—and I recognise my husband in the gallery tonight—there are many people who have not respected marriage in the past. Many people divorce. Let us say that heterosexuals have not necessarily always abided by that very reverend sanctity of marriage. I believe that that is often a furphy.

People marry for all kinds of reasons not just because they want to have children. They marry for companionship. They marry for love. There are people who even marry on their deathbed. There are many reasons people marry. If you want to mimic it in this legislation, why would you be upset? It is not about discrimination because all this bill does is enable couples to register their relationship as married couples can. It only extends what is currently legal in this country, not what is illegal, such as polygamous relationships. This is a furphy of an argument. In fact, giving couples a choice to enter civil partnerships actually reduces discrimination.

When we strip away all of the other arguments about whether Queensland can or cannot legislate for civil partnerships or whether there was or was not enough time to consider this bill—and no-one was denied the right to be heard—and when we look at this honestly, what the opposition to this bill is all about

is extending the rights for civil partnerships to members of the LGBT community or same-sex partners. Shame on those who do not support this bill simply because of that reason. I would hazard a guess that if this bill did not extend to members of the LGBT community there would be no opposition to it because the arguments being used against this bill make no sense.

There are all sorts of families in our community and, although many members of the public want to believe in certain community standards, that is not the reality. The reality is that this bill changes nothing that happens in society today. But it will allow equal rights to couples in our community who want to enter a civil relationship. Members of the LGBT community have children. Members of the LGBT community are in relationships, and often long-term relationships. Members of the LGBT community love and commit just like everyone else. They are valued and respected members of our community. This bill is about equality and fairness and recognition. They are not second-class citizens but just as productive, honest and upstanding members of our community as are so-called straights. As Derek Cronin said at the public hearing—

Recognition is pro commitment. It encourages healthy relationships.

I agreed entirely when he said that at the public hearing on behalf of the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities. It is not the government's role to say whom we should love and commit to or whom we want to spend the rest of our lives with, but we should be making it equal for everyone who wants to demonstrate that civil partnership and give them the ability to do so, and I support that unequivocally.

The Queensland Council for Civil Liberties referred to article 7 which talks about all being equal before the law. I believe—and I was very distressed about this—that the member for Kawana went very close to misleading witnesses at the public hearing by misquoting article 16 of the United Nations. He stated—

I think the point I am trying to make is that, if you rely on article 7, how can you not rely on article 16, which talks about marriage between a man and a woman? I do not know if you can pick and choose articles.

That is very misleading because article 16, as I read verbatim into the transcript, says nothing of the sort, that it is about marriage between a man and a woman. I stress that it is very concerning for him to do that as a possible alternative Attorney-General in this state. Article 16 simply mentions that men and women of full age without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion have the right to marry and found a family. That is very different from misleading witnesses to believe that it is about a man and a woman.

Mr Bleijie: I think the civil libertarian society agree with me.

Ms GRACE: I would not say too much if I were the honourable member because I will take his interjections and I will put them on the record.

It is an honour to support this bill. This is about equality, fairness and recognition. This is about being a member of this parliament and standing up for what you believe in, and I believe that this is the right thing to do. It makes me proud to be a member of the ALP which 21 years ago decriminalised homosexuality. This is about joining the many states that also have, as recognised by Shelley Argent this afternoon, civil partnerships for same-sex couples. New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT have such civil partnerships recognition and, guess what, the sky has not fallen. I am a very proud member of the ALP. It is a great honour to speak to this bill tonight. I will support it. I commend the bill wholeheartedly to the House.