



Speech by
Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Thursday, 21 June 2012

CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (7.31 pm): Tonight I rise to oppose the amendments introduced by the LNP. I fundamentally believe in equality for all Queenslanders, including people in same-sex relationships. I would like to reiterate the values I stated during the introduction of civil unions in November 2011.

In so many ways Queensland has evolved to become a vibrant community, a tolerant and accepting state. We have come a long way from the dark ages of the 1970s and the 1980s when Queensland was seen by the rest of Australia as a place of moral and social hypocrisy. It was seen as a state where the government professed moral superiority on the surface while in reality it allowed corruption to flourish and basic civil rights to be crushed. Considering how far we have come as a state and as a community in a relatively short period, we should always remember the lessons of those days. We should not forget the past.

Many changes have occurred since then. Education, disability services, community support and investment in health have lifted. Civil and industrial rights have been restored and a generation of Queenslanders have grown up in a society that now values diversity, appreciates fairness and decency, and encourages innovation and freedom of expression. But while we have come a long way, some were left behind along the journey. We had in place institutionalised discrimination where one group of people were denied the rights enjoyed by others.

I said last year—and I believe it still—love knows no boundary. It was unacceptable that in 2011 people were still being discriminated against on the basis of their sexuality. It is certainly unacceptable that in 2012 people would seek to remove those hard-fought rights that were unfairly denied to people until just recently. I support people in same-sex relationships who believe that it is well within their rights to have their loving, committed relationship officially recognised by law in addition to their family and their friends.

It is very telling that the LNP is rushing this bill through parliament. It is a symbol of the disrespect that the government has for people in same-sex relationships that it would seek to introduce a bill without proper debate. It is also a sign of its disrespect that it believes that a bill that affects same-sex couples in a very real way does not deserve a committee hearing and does not deserve to receive appropriate attention in this House. I would like to remind the government that, when introducing the civil union legislation in 2011, the issue was referred to the committee where the public input was allowed and public input was received.

The LNP government's approach to this legislation is not just a slap in the face to same-sex couples; it also reaffirms the absolute contempt which the LNP government has for this parliament. We all know that last year we voted—and I say this especially for the new members who were not here then—to set up a committee system. This committee system was set up with bipartisan support. It is an essential feature of our democracy now here in Queensland. There is absolutely no reason this bill, introduced by the Attorney-General yesterday, could not have gone to the committee system so that members in the public gallery who are here tonight could have participated and put forward their case to the members of the government. I commend the people in the public gallery who have come in—

Mr Bleijie: Still using the political football.

Mr Stevens: Rent-a-crowd.

Ms PALASZCZUK: These are people—people with concerns. These are people with compassion. These are people with hearts. These are people with dignity.

An incident having occurred in the public gallery—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Berry): Order! Just resume your seat for the moment. Members of the gallery, we live in a democracy, and part of that democracy is that the public are here at the behest of that democracy. I implore you to be quiet and allow the Leader of the Opposition to finish her speech. If, in fact, I need to warn again then the gallery may be vacated. I would appreciate it if you would comply with that request.

Ms PALASZCZUK: The person who introduced this bill into the parliament is the Attorney-General of the state. It is one of the most esteemed positions in the Queensland government and here he is tonight rolling back, winding back, people's basic fundamental human rights. It is so disappointing to see this from such a young Attorney-General, who has recently been appointed to one of the highest positions in this state. You have bypassed the committee system—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition—

Ms PALASZCZUK: The Attorney-General has bypassed the committee system—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hold on, you have been in the House long enough to know the rules.

Ms PALASZCZUK: The Attorney-General has bypassed the committee system. Not only that, the Leader of the House has also bypassed the committee system, because it has been agreed by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly that, when any new bill coming into this House is to be debated, it would go through a committee of the Legislative Assembly, and this government has failed to live by the rules that it agreed to. You should hang your heads in shame tonight because you are denying people—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Take a seat for a moment. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition not to use 'you'. You did use it. Address the chair, please.

Ms PALASZCZUK: We know how important this issue is to so many people.

Mrs Ostapovitch: Some!

Ms PALASZCZUK: No, not just to some. This is what the member here has said—some people. No, this is an issue, regardless of whether you are in the Labor Party, the Liberal Party or the National Party, about people who have rights and they have dignity and we owe them respect. There are many same-sex couples who live in your electorates—not just my electorate, not just in the electorate of the member for Mackay or the member for Bundamba or the member for Rockhampton—they live in your electorate, the member for Southern Downs, the Attorney-General and the member for Mermaid Beach.

People have a right to express their views; they have a right to express their love. Tonight will be very interesting. There are many new members in this government. It is a very differently shaped government. It will be very interesting to see how many of these new members will be participating in this debate tonight. Have they carefully considered the issues and what they will be voting on? This is going to be the real test for the government. We know that its members have been divided. We know that there has been unsettlement in their caucus room. We know that there have been divisions. We know that there have been arguments. We understand that Mr Bruce McIver has been involved, that he has not been very happy with the Premier's position. We know that there are many members on the backbench who are concerned about the direction that the Attorney-General has taken. We have also heard that the Attorney-General wanted to wind back the laws even further.

I find it disappointing that, having come to power a little over three months ago, the LNP believes that taking away rights from Queenslanders is one of its highest priorities. The bill that the government has brought before the House is, quite simply, mean and petty. Why is it that the members of this government have such hearts of stone that they cannot find it within themselves to allow same-sex couples to officially celebrate? What is wrong with allowing people to celebrate their love and their commitment in front of their family and their friends? What, Attorney-General, is so wrong about that? What is it that fills the hearts of those opposite with such hatred and pettiness that they think it improves the lives of Queenslanders to deny a group within our community the right to, of all things, officially celebrate their love and commitment to each other? As I said in November last year, providing same-sex couples the opportunity to legally celebrate their relationship in a fair and compassionate society—in an accepting society—is important.

Last year the Labor Party allowed its members a conscience vote on this issue. We participated in a respectful, decent debate that included those who did not hold the same position as I did. The LNP claims to be the party of liberalism. Where are those true great Liberals who had been around in the past? Where have they gone? Those opposite have denied their own MPs a conscience vote. You have denied your own people a conscience vote. It is remarkable. I ask the members for Mount Coot-tha, Brisbane Central,

Bulimba and Greenslopes: do you really think you are voting on behalf of your constituents and that this is what the community thinks at the moment? Go out and talk to people in your communities. I recently had this discussion with my grandmother. She has pretty old traditional values. I respect what she said. She said, 'If people want to celebrate their love and commitment, let them do it. Who am I to judge?' This is an 87-year-old woman. But this is not just the view of my grandmother; this is the view of constituents that come into my office day in and day out.

A government member interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Yes. Yes. There is community acceptance and you need to wake up and realise that your community is made up of a diverse range of people from different walks of life, from different backgrounds and from overseas. You need to accept that in our society there are different views. The community attitudes around this issue have changed and you must move with the times. I say to those MPs: stand in this chamber and exercise a conscience vote. Put your position on the record. Do not hide behind a lack of a conscience vote. Do not hide behind the mean-spirited compromise cooked up by the Premier and the Attorney-General. Could you really stand in front of same-sex couples in your community and say to them, 'I don't care how long you've been in your relationship, I don't care how much you love each other, you do not have the right to officially celebrate'?

Mr Cox: Haven't made a law against it.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Read the legislation. You are saying to people that they will not be able to celebrate their commitment. Queensland has come a long way, and this parliament should not remove rights from decent Queenslanders whose only sin is that they are in a committed, loving, same-sex relationship and want to officially celebrate that relationship. I call on those opposite who do not agree with this legislation to take the principled approach and vote for fairness and equality. This is nothing but a mean-spirited change from a cold-hearted government, and I urge the House to oppose this bill.