




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Record of Proceedings, 3 December 2015

RELATIONSHIPS (CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS) AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (3.02 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Relationships (Civil Partnerships) and Other Acts Amendment Bill. 'We live in a modern, vibrant, tolerant and accepting state.' These are the words that commenced my speech in this House on 30 November 2011 during the debate on the Civil Partnerships Bill. The 2011 bill allowed for two things: it provided for the legal recognition of relationships of couples by registration of their relationship; and allowed couples the option of holding a ceremony before a civil partnership person, where the declaration of their relationship could be celebrated by their family and friends.

This was an important and significant moment in Queensland's history. It marked a turning of the corner, where the Queensland of the seventies and eighties—the Queensland of Joh Bjelke-Petersen and Russ Hinze—came of age. We had made some enormous progress since those days, but change had not come at the same pace for all Queenslanders. Unfortunately, some Queenslanders had been left behind in some respects, and the Civil Partnerships Bill in a small way made amends for that oversight.

But 2012 saw a return to the past. Unfortunately, those words of tolerance and acceptance were not as true some seven months later when I again rose in this House to speak against the bill introduced by the member for Kawana. The bill turned back the clock to the 1970s by amending the act to remove the right of couples to participate in a recognition ceremony before their family and friends. The bill was rushed through this House. It was introduced one day, declared urgent so as to forgo committee scrutiny and debated the next. I know that not all in the parliament support this bill. I also know that some people have changed their views on this issue since they previously voted, and I welcome that change.

There were quite a number of Queenslanders who took the time to make written submissions to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee in relation to this bill, and I thank them for their diligence and the passion with which they undertook this task. I note the submission by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, who summed up the position with great clarity. He said—

The Commission supports the right for all couples enter into a legally recognised relationship, with the option to have an official civil ceremony. Providing the option for same-sex couples to have their relationship recognised, with or without civil ceremony, is consistent with the right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of a person's sexuality.

I note that some of the submissions oppose the bill on the basis that the recognition ceremonies mirror marriage. This is not the case. As the Very Reverend Dr Peter Catt, Dean of St John's Anglican Cathedral and Chair of the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission said in his submission—

... the Bill addressed what philosopher John Rawls called a foundational principle of justice: That is, that Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all ...

He went on to say—

We believe that the act and legitimacy of religious marriage is not denied or denigrated by enabling same sex couples—or opposite-sex couples who have different (or no) spiritual beliefs—to publicly commit to each other in a way that is legally and socially recognised.

Thus, the Social Responsibilities Committee supports the proposed *Relationships (Civil Partnerships) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015* because it removes discrimination, affords equal rights to same sex and heterosexual couples in civil partnerships, and recognises the pluralistic nature of our society.

In his speech during the 2012 vote, the member for Kawana announced that he would be introducing legislation similar to that previously introduced by the member for Southern Downs—laws which ensured that any gay or lesbian couple who entered into a surrogacy agreement would face a prison sentence of three years. I think this is something that we all must address.

Today I am in the unique position of speaking for the third time in support of the recognition of civil partnership ceremonies in this House. For the third time I am happy to stand up in this House to say that love knows no boundary. Thousands of same-sex couples who love and are committed to one another want nothing more than to have their relationship formally recognised not only by their family and friends but by the law.

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 this House removed those hard fought rights that had been unfairly denied people until only months before. I did then, and I still do, support people in same-sex relationships who believe that it is well within their rights to have their loving, committed relationship officially recognised at law, in addition to being recognised by their family and friends.

One of the major reasons that I support this legislation, and one of the major reasons that I opposed the Newman government changes, was the positive effect it will have on younger lesbian, gay and bisexual people. These are the people who can struggle to come to terms with their sexuality, who may suffer associated depression and isolation. We as a parliament and we as a community cannot stand by and let that happen. By allowing all people in committed relationships to have the option of having their relationships recognised and celebrated, we reinforce the message that these are healthy and loving relationships. We reinforce acceptance. We celebrate our diversity. We celebrate tolerance. I commend this bill to the House.