




Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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**ADOPTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (10.15 pm): I rise this evening to speak on the Adoption and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 which is in essence a legal process that provides a recognised avenue to establishing a permanent, legal family for children who, for various reasons, cannot live with their family. The adoption process transfers all legal rights and responsibilities for the permanent care of a child under 18 years of age from a child's birth parents to the adoptive parent or parents. The adoption bill needed to be amended to ensure a fair and equitable process is in place when going through the adoption process. At the very heart of this is the children themselves who rightly, due to whatever circumstances, should be placed in those families who want to provide a loving, meaningful, safe family environment where the child can be loved, nurtured and raised throughout their childhood years. Who would not want this to occur?

I have relatives, albeit interstate, who due to certain circumstances have been unable to have babies. However, they have taken on the very demanding role of raising five foster-children who also want to be raised in a safe and loving environment. They are long-term foster carers, and I have seen them go through the painstaking, slow process of exploring adoption. I do hope that through the amendments of this bill the process in Queensland is somewhat easier to navigate and is a smoother process time wise for those good people wanting to seek adoption of children in our state.

I certainly commend the minister and her department for making these amendments which will provide more people the opportunity to apply for and go through the adoption process should they wish to. These amendments go to same-sex couples and single parents, and I say why not? As a modern society, we should, as I said in the committee process, just get on with it, in particular reference to allowing same-sex couples to go through the adoption process. Apart from the opposing views of some—and as a committee member we must respect the views of all—I personally believe this particular amendment is well and truly due because I think, as previously stated, providing a loving, caring, nurturing and safe environment is core to raising a child, regardless of gender, so again let us just get on with it.

The main objective of the act is to provide for the adoption of children and for access to information about parties to adoptions in Queensland in a way that: promotes the wellbeing and best interests of adopted persons throughout their lives; supports efficient and accountable practice in the delivery of adoption services; and complies with Australia's obligations as a ratifying country to the 1993 Hague convention on protection of children. The relevant legislation in Queensland is the Adoption Act 2009, which commenced in February 2010, replacing the former 1964 Adoption of Children Act. A statutory requirement of the act was that the minister review its operations five years from its commencement. That review commenced in September 2015 and was completed in August this year. The review found the act, whilst operating as it intended, had opportunities to enhance the legislation to provide a stronger and more effective framework for adoption in Queensland. There was significant

consultation during the review, where 216 individuals responded to an online survey, 77 individuals and organisations provided written submissions and 63 individuals participated in focus groups or interviews.

Other jurisdictions—New South Wales and South Australia—have also reviewed their adoption legislation and we have seen a Commonwealth Senate inquiry into former adoption policies and practices. New South Wales and Victoria have made notable changes following their reviews and a bill sits before the South Australian parliament seeking similar reforms. Our bill is consistent with these and other recent legislative amendments in most Australian states, particularly extending eligibility criteria to same-sex couples and for single persons to adopt. Our committee heard from a range of organisations like the Australian Christian Lobby and Family Voice Australia, who in particular supported allowing single-parent adoption but only in exceptional and extraordinary circumstances.

With regards to eligibility for the expression of interest register, the same rigorous assessment process that applies to heterosexual couples will apply to same-sex couples and single people who express an interest in adopting a child. At the first stage things like personal history checks, domestic violence, traffic checks and child protection history for all adult members are conducted to ensure there is no unacceptable risk of harm to the child. If couples are assessed as meeting the basis of suitability, they must participate in a minimum four to five face-to-face interviews in their home for the chief executive to consider.

Broad community expectations have shifted in line with evolving notions of family. There is evidence that same-sex couples and single parents can indeed provide long, loving and nurturing environments in which to raise a child. The bill recognises the need to provide fairness and equity and amends eligibility criteria in the adoption process. I would like to thank the minister, fellow committee members, the secretariat and the department for the work to date in the development of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.