




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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ADOPTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (10.25 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Adoption and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. I support the Palaszczuk government overturning discriminatory laws to make it legal for same-sex couples to adopt children in Queensland. I am proud we are removing one of the last discriminatory barriers that prevents lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex Queenslanders from being able to adopt a child. It is time Queensland joined other Australian states and territories to remove this archaic chapter from our adoption laws. As a society we do not tolerate discrimination. It is only fair that members of the LGBTI community have the same rights as any other Queenslanders and that includes the right to raise a family with an adopted child.

The statutory review of the Adoption Act asked Queenslanders to share their experiences of adoption and how they thought the process could be improved. Queenslanders were overwhelmingly in support of the removal of additional barriers that prevent single people and couples undergoing fertility treatment, such as IVF, from adopting children. I am proud to support this bill which will widen the eligibility criteria to allow those groups to adopt. The reforms will bring Queensland into line with New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia and Victoria in allowing adoption by same-sex couples and singles.

Adoption provides a permanent family and legal identity for children in Queensland who cannot live with their birth family. Since the review began in September 2015, more than 350 Queenslanders and organisations have had their say on the state's adoption legislation. This review has given us the opportunity to make sure the legislation is up to date and reflects the needs and experiences of children requiring adoption now and into the future.

The reforms also remove the offence and penalty for a breach of contact statement for adoptions prior to June 1991, facilitate face-to-face contact during interim adoption orders between an adoptee and their birth family, improve access to information and streamline the step-parent application process. During consultation, stakeholders impacted by past forced adoption policies and practices expressed strong views about contact statements, reporting the offence provision and its penalties cause considerable trauma and fear.

I support the removal of the offence and associated penalty for a breach of a contact statement for adoptions that occurred before June 1991. The removal of the criminal offence and associated penalties brings the legislation into line with other jurisdictions. Up to two years imprisonment is an excessive penalty which causes unnecessary trauma and fear and that penalty has discouraged individuals from accessing adoption information. The legislated penalties are also felt by some to be another rejection and an inappropriate state intervention in the life of adoptees and birth families. The removal of the penalties provides a more appropriate balance, while still providing the necessary safeguards. I recognise those people in the gallery this evening who have been impacted by forced adoption policies and practices.

Contact statements are not being removed by the bill because many people entering into an adoption still wish to have a formal record of their wishes with regard to contact. However, the same provisions will apply to everyone affected by a contact statement regardless of when the adoption occurred. These amendments balance the rights and interests of people who wish to have access to information with the ongoing use of contact statements to establish a person's preference not to be contacted and protect their right to privacy.

I am very proud to support this bill today because I can speak from experience when it comes to adoption. When I was a child, my aunty and uncle, Peter and Mandy, or affectionately known by my family as Aunty Diddy and Uncle Pongy, adopted four beautiful children, my cousins, Edwin, Ingrid, Alex and Vanessa, from Columbia. My Aunt Mandy and Uncle Peter are two people full of love and they love family.

They have always been there for me throughout my life and loved me like their own daughter. They had a deep desire to have a family of their own, so they chose to adopt Edwin, Ingrid, Alex and Vanessa from Colombia and raise them in Australia. Edwin, Ingrid, Alex and Vanessa are my cousins, and they were raised by loving, dedicated parents. Mandy and Peter were also active foster carers and their foster-children Melinda and Julie, also my cousins, were raised with the same love and affection. It was wonderful having adopted cousins from Colombia. I learned a lot from them. We had a lot of fun growing up together, spending Christmases, birthdays and family events together. Edwin is an avid golfer, Alex taught me a lot about cooking fish and Vanessa and Ingrid were always good fun to hang out with. I would argue that my aunt and uncle cared for, loved, nurtured and raised my adopted and foster cousins.

I support same-sex couples and adopted children having the same opportunity to be a family. We understand that, although we are not blood related, the love and respect we hold for another one is what makes us a family because blood does not define family. Even though we may not have the same hair or eye colour, or in fact skin colour, it has never felt like my adopted and foster cousins were not my family. Our family is unconventional for a lot of reasons, but at the end of the day we are just like everybody else. In preparation for the debate on this bill I spoke to both my aunt and uncle about their opinion as adoptive parents and foster carers. Both my aunt and uncle said that they whole-heartedly support the ability for same-sex couples to adopt.

I support this bill because the formula for a happy family is not a heterosexual relationship. The research shows that the formula for a happy family is communication such as listening to each other, togetherness, spending time together, sharing activities, sharing memories, celebrating together, supporting one another, affection, caring about each other, acceptance, respect, commitment, feeling safe, trust, having rules and resilience such as talking things through, being there for each other in the tough times and pulling together in a crisis. The happiness of family is not dependent on the gender mix of the family. A happy family is not about a man and a women; a family is about love and safety. I commend the bill to the House.