




Speech By  
**Hon. Shannon Fentiman**

**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

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Record of Proceedings, 2 November 2016

**ADOPTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (10.49 pm), in reply: I want to thank all members for their contributions to today's debate of the Adoption and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. This is indeed an emotive area and, as we have heard here today, each person is affected differently by their own unique experiences. Although adoption numbers in Queensland are small and have been consistently low since the commencement of the Adoption Act in 2010, the impacts of adoption are far reaching. Adoption has a legacy which we must never forget. The Adoption Act made enormous progress to provide an open, modern framework for adoption in Queensland. The thorough review of the operation of the act found that there are opportunities for us to go further and to improve Queensland's adoption laws. The bill will bring Queensland into line with reforms in other jurisdictions and responds to extensive feedback we received during the review process.

The opposition said that the government has not made a case to expand the number of persons who are eligible to express an interest in being assessed for suitability as adoptive parents due to the small numbers of children requiring adoption. The Queensland government has made a strong case for change. Indeed, it is the people of Queensland who contributed to our surveys and our request for feedback that have made that strong case for change. It is not a matter of supply and demand, as the member for Mudgeeraba has so crudely put it. It is a matter of fairness. It is a matter of removing unfair discrimination from the Queensland statute books. This is why the Queensland Family and Child Commissioner supports the change. It is why the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner supports the change. It is why the Australian Human Rights Commission has called for this change, and the people of Queensland have made this case for removing discrimination. Eighty per cent of those who commented on eligibility during the consultation process told us that the current rules were unfair and do not continue to meet the needs of children who require adoptive families. Rightly so, the act will continue to hold that the wellbeing and best interests of adopted persons throughout their lives are paramount.

Expanding the pool of persons who may express interest in adoption in Queensland will provide government with a more diverse range of people who may be selected for a child. The member for Mudgeeraba said that adoption is not about appeasing those who want to adopt; it is about finding the best possible home for a child to grow up in. I could not agree more. Expanding the eligibility criteria will provide a wider and richer pool of people so that we can ultimately find the right home for each child who requires adoption. I also want to acknowledge the beautiful story that the member for Mount Coot-tha shared with us tonight, clearly making the point that loving families come in many shapes and sizes. The member for Mount Coot-tha quite rightly pointed out that same-sex couples are just as able to provide a stable, loving and caring home as any other couple.

The member for Mudgeeraba also queried why the bill does not address recommendations of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry's 2012 report about the adoption of children from out-of-home care and I will seek to clarify this for the member for Mudgeeraba to address her confusion. Adoption from out-of-home care is already provided for by the Child Protection Act and the Adoption Act except of course by foster carers who are in same-sex relationships. As the member for Mount Coot-tha also pointed out, this must change. The member for Mudgeeraba may be aware that the Queensland government is progressing wideranging reforms to the child protection system and through a number of initiatives under these reforms we are improving permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care. Legislation is not the solution to every problem and we are making significant advances through improvements in policy, processes, practice and culture.

The members for Mudgeeraba and Gaven said that this legislation has been rushed, which is absurd. It is beyond belief that they would make this claim. We conducted a review of the Adoption Act over a six-month period from September 2015 to March 2016. The public was invited to comment by making a submission or responding to an online survey. We held targeted focus groups with 63 individuals who had personal experiences with adoption. Stakeholders have been consulted at every step of the way throughout the development of this bill. The Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee examined the bill. The legislation has not been rushed. It has been carefully developed based on what Queenslanders told us and based on what the evidence tells us is in a child's best interests.

The bill responds to our community, adoption stakeholders, operational staff and research from around Australia and overseas to ensure the adoption framework in Queensland promotes the best interests and wellbeing of adopted persons throughout their lives. Again, I want to extend my thanks to the committee for its examination of the bill as well as the honourable members who contributed to today's debate. I also want to thank the hardworking staff from my department for their excellent work on this bill. Finally and most importantly, I want to thank the adoption stakeholders and individuals who contributed to the committee process, the review of the operation of the act and the development of the bill before this House. I commend the bill to the House.