



Speech by

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COMMONWEALTH POWERS [DE FACTO RELATIONSHIPS] BILL

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (5.19 p.m.): I rise to speak briefly in support of the Commonwealth Powers (De Facto Relationships) Bill, brought to the House by the Attorney-General. As other members have said, the bill refers to the Commonwealth's Family Court power to make determinations over matters relating to children and property for couples who are in de facto relationships.

I endorse the comments of the member for Hervey Bay, who pointed out the simple good sense of this bill. It is quite obvious that any couple whose de facto relationship sadly has broken up would not want to go to two different courts to deal with matters to do with custody of their children and property settlement. Why would anyone want to do that? It is disappointing that it has taken 10 years of negotiation to get to this point of fundamental commonsense—that is, that people in de facto relationships should have the opportunity to go to one court to sort out the ends of their relationship. I am very pleased today to speak on this piece of legislation which enacts that really commonsense kind of change.

It seems to me abundantly clear that we should have a uniform way of dealing with these matters across all of the states of Australia. I think it is very disappointing that the federal government, because of its prejudice, has at this stage decided that it will deal only with matters to do with straight couples in de facto relationships and not gay couples in de facto relationships. I think it is extremely disappointing that in this day and age we continue to judge. It seems to me that relationships are based on love and trust, and relationships based on love and trust are something that we in our community should encourage. We should not try to distinguish greatly between relationships involving gay couples and those involving straight couples or whomever else on the basis that one is somehow morally superior and therefore will come under the umbrella of the federal government. I think that is a really disappointing notion in this day and age, but it is not at all surprising to see that coming out of the Howard government.

I think the Howard government's agenda on family matters has been extremely conservative and extremely disappointing over a period of many years. It continues to discriminate against gay couples, as it does with this legislation. It continues to show tremendous disrespect to gay people, as it did most recently with the absolutely abhorrent Michael Kirby affair, where those terrible allegations were made quite untruthfully about him and where the Howard government did not even really bother to apologise.

Mr Mulherin: That's because it was Howard's mate, though.

Ms NOLAN: That is right. I think it is also very disappointing that the Howard government keeps trying to keep us in the fifties when it comes to an agenda for women. In recent years the Howard government's agenda has been all about reassuring women if they feel guilty and do not feel they can work and raise a family. The agenda has been about saying, 'That's okay, girls. Don't worry about that. We'll support you if you choose to stay at home.' The agenda should have been about what it could do to help women and support women in making their own way in the world, making their own choices and being successful in every facet of their life. That is not what it has been about. Despite the fact that we are now in 2003, the Howard government continues to discriminate against women and, as we are seeing in the response to this legislation today, it continues to discriminate against loving, decent gay people.

I am very pleased to be part of a progressive government that does not choose to do either of those things. I am pleased to be part of a government that supports all members of our community. It does not say, 'If you are a woman, if you are gay or if you are in a de facto relationship you are not quite as good and we will look at you a bit sideways because you are a bit morally suspect.' I think the agenda the Attorney-General is trying to push forward is an extremely positive one. I commend him for that work and I commend the bill to the House.