



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Same-Sex Marriage**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 15 November 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 15 November 2010  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Billson, Bruce, MP

**Source** House  
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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr BILLSON** (Dunkley) (8.46 pm)—Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate tonight on the member for Melbourne's private member's motion. It originally sought to convey some current information about international trends and domestic opinions about same-sex marriage and it urges members to engage with constituents about community views. Email traffic that I have received, though, has interpreted the member's motion as being more about moving forward with equal recognition for all couples and a call for marriage equality. Others included one sent to me and presented as being from the [webeditor@greensmps.org.au](mailto:webeditor@greensmps.org.au) and actually coming from me, which I found quite amusing. I got an email from myself, which I did not write, that claimed that this motion was a 'dangerous proposal' which would undermine society.

Clearly, what the motion says—and the manoeuvres on the amendments tonight are one thing—and what many people believe it is actually about vary greatly. Tonight the motion has been varied on the floor, and we are now discussing a different subject. But with the vast majority of the communications I have had on this motion being about the broader topic of same-sex marriage, this is where I will focus my remarks.

As I have previously stated, I do not support the definition of marriage being altered to include same-sex couples. I believe that marriage is a union between a man and a woman and I do not support any change to Commonwealth law that could diminish the institution. I would be supportive of a national register of civil unions and relationships that clearly captures and conveys the dignified and honoured status of a committed and durable relationship between two adults that can be witnessed by family, friends and a broader community. Countries with civil unions and registered partnership legislation include Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Greenland, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and at least 10 states in the United States. This of course is an avenue open to Australia, and I urge its examination.

I encourage an examination of civil unions and registered partnerships as a pathway that would afford an opportunity for special and dignified status and state sanctioned honour in a manner that I believe would engender public support and confidence. In my view public support and confidence matters. As public attitudes evolve, support for the continuing evolution and nurturing of this public view is important if moves are to be supported by the public. A celebration or a public commitment in the form of a marriage is one form of expression of the form, character, quality and durability of a relationship. It is no impediment to having other relationships that are part of a public commitment and celebrated in another form, with another character, another quality and other durability.

But the important thing is that if we are to move forward with this recognition we cannot do so by diminishing the sense of right and designation that people who have married have chosen for themselves. It is quite ironic that this charge for rights is being pursued by diminishing the rights of those who have chosen to designate their relationship a traditional marriage. I do not understand that logic. People who have entered into a marriage as it is defined and recognised under the law, whether it be by way of tradition, custom, conservatism or religious orientation, have done so consciously, knowing that that is the designation they have sought, that that will be the designation they will secure and that the nature of the relationship they have entered into will be recognised as such by the broader community. We should not seek to remove that from people who have chosen that pathway and have operated within the current definition of marriage, which I agree with. What we should aim to do is offer another pathway, one that is a public commitment also, a celebration, an expression of the form, character, quality and durability of a same-sex relationship. But it does not need to appropriate the definition and the title of 'marriage'. Let us call it something else. Let us grant the desire for recognition that some want.

In conversations with my friends and the local community, the gay community are not as one on this voice. Many convey to me a belief in the importance and the quality of the relationship, not the title or the moniker that it attracts. Those in a traditional marriage hold fast to that distinction because that is a definition they chose for themselves. A pathway forward should be able to accommodate both. (*Time expired*)