



Same Sex Marriage

Main Committee

24 August 2011

Ms Grierson (Newcastle) — (11:44): In late 2010 the House resolved that members should seek the views of constituents on a specific matter—the ways to achieve equal treatment for same-sex couples, including marriage. I was pleased to speak in that original debate, and I welcome this debate. It is good for members to hear the views from all around the country. We have different electorates. I have an inner-city electorate, and I welcome the opportunity to hear other people's viewpoints from the people they represent.

Like the offices of many members, my office has received many passionate representations both in support of and in opposition to same-sex marriage. I believe it is important to acknowledge there are very genuine and often very deeply held views on both sides of this debate. In my own electorate, since November last year, those that have approached my office in favour of same-sex marriage have outnumbered those opposed. In that time, approximately 800 individuals have contacted my office in writing, by phone call, in person or by email to express their support for removing discrimination against same-sex couples in marriage. In the same time, around 470 people have registered their opposition to allowing same-sex marriage. These results, of course, are not scientific, but there is evidence of substantial community support in my electorate for same-sex marriage, and it comes to me as no surprise. Newcastle is a city that has experienced hardship over many decades and it seems to be able to cut life down to the basics. They believe in a fair go. People who are positive and leading good lives are always given respect.

My own support for marriage equality is clear and longstanding. In 2006, I was the first member of parliament to sign the Marriage Equality Charter, which supports the legislation of same-sex marriage, and since that time I have consistently restated my support, both privately in

internal ALP debates and publicly on the floor of the parliament. In my first speech on this matter, I made the point that I do so as a heterosexual mother of two heterosexual daughters. I do so because it is a mainstream issue. It is about the dignity of life, the dignity of love and that ongoing quest that mankind has for some partnering, support or a wonderful relationship that many people have the blessing to share.

I do say it is an issue that goes to the core of the human experience—the need to be loved, to love and the need to have a bond for some people formally recognised in a union called marriage. I have also said that as a public representative, as an individual within my family, my community and with all the people I deal with every day, I address people's issues and concerns, not their sexual preferences. We should not discriminate against people.

I also said in my first speech that I was moved by parents who said to me that of their two children, two sons—and I praise Michelle Lancey in my electorate, who started the Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gay Children—the heterosexual one can marry and the other cannot. It is really important to know that for loving parents the gender nature of their children's relationship is secondary. They want them to be happy. They want them to experience the support of a loving relationship.

My support also runs to the core of my beliefs that made me become a member of parliament and a member of the Labor Party, and that simply is that legislated discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation whether in marriage law, superannuation law, social security law or any other law is unconscionable and should be removed. Labor has a very proud and unequalled record of combating discrimination across-the-board in Australian society—the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and our removal of 85 pieces of discrimination against same-sex couples from Commonwealth laws. I do not think any other political party has done so much, but we all know that this is the big one. This is the one that people pine for and people express concern for.

I am very pleased to share the views of my electorate. I am very pleased to hear their views, to discuss those with them and to then stand up for my judgement and my personal belief. I will continue to stand up and be counted in support of marriage equality for all Australians.