



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**BILLS**

**Marriage Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2012**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 20 September 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

<p><b>Date</b> Thursday, 20 September 2012  <b>Page</b> 44  <b>Questioner</b>  <b>Speaker</b> Urquhart, Sen Anne</p>	<p><b>Source</b> Senate  <b>Proof</b> Yes  <b>Responder</b>  <b>Question No.</b></p>
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**Senator URQUHART** (Tasmania) (13:44): On the 11 January 1975 I married the person I love and each year on that day we are able to say to one another, 'Happy wedding anniversary'. We have two wonderful children and four gorgeous grandchildren. Our family is everything to us. Our daughter's wedding was a priceless occasion. This is the third time I have risen in this place to speak in support of marriage equality—to give all families, all couples the special moment of a marriage ceremony, of being part of an institution that, yes, has been around in many different forms throughout human history.

In the lead-up to the ALP's national conference I spoke on the need for the conference to change our platform to amend the Marriage Act to allow any two adults, regardless of sex, sexuality or gender identity, the honour and privilege of standing in front of their family and friends and making a commitment to each other; to allow the children of a couple in a same sex relationship the stability of knowing that their family is just as special in this country as all other families; and to allow the community to celebrate the love and commitment of two Australians.

I have shared the stories of Jenny, Jen, Peter, Martine and Maxine in the hope that it would add some dignity and some human faces to the campaign to remove this legislated discrimination—discrimination that the 42nd Parliament did so well to expel. In 2008 the 42nd Parliament removed discrimination against same-sex de facto couples in over 85 pieces of Commonwealth legislation. But it fell short of amending the Marriage Act to support equality for all. And so the campaign continued.

In Tasmania, the campaign to end this discrimination was led by Robbie Moore, our Rainbow Labor Convenor. I have known Robbie for many years. I knew him when he was in a heterosexual relationship. Since he has been in a same-sex relationship, I have seen him the happiest in all the time I have known him. Robbie's family are featured in an advertisement in Tasmanian media calling on support for marriage equality. This shows the love for their son and is something all parents can learn from. For Matt and Robbie, marriage equality means that they will be equal in society's eyes, and any excuses used for discrimination will be eliminated. When this positive reform is achieved it will allow Matt and Robbie to

share with their family and friends a wedding day. Matt and Robbie have attended the weddings of their brothers and sisters. Their siblings have been able to share that private, special day with their families. And yet we bar Matt and Robbie from doing the same.

Robbie's tireless lobbying, together with the entire team from Rainbow Labor, is part of the reason we have this bill here today. Labor members from across the country and from across the spectrum of unions have rallied together to end this discrimination. As the 43rd Parliament, we should heed this call and remove this final piece of discrimination. In a recent speech I outlined why my Labor values and the values of so many Australians are compatible with support for marriage equality. I told of how Labor values of fairness, equality, family and compassion fitted naturally with support for marriage equality; and of how Labor is the party of progress, the party of reasoned and logical government and why this reform fits as a true Labor reform. I congratulate Senators Brown, Pratt, Marshall and Crossin for their bill. It is a comprehensive bill and reflects the work done by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Senate Committee under Senator Crossin's leadership.

I acknowledge that this debate is difficult for some, that the community is divided and that for many overcoming long-held prejudices is tough. That is why I approach this debate with my Labor values at the fore. There are honest, decent, hardworking Australians who want nothing but acceptance in our society. There have been arguments put forward against reform, but I believe that these arguments are easily refuted and I am encouraged by polling on this issue that indicates that the clear majority of Australians also feel the same way.

In the lead-up to the debate on the Same-Sex Marriage Bill in the Tasmanian parliament a column appeared in the *Launceston Examiner*. In her regular column conservative columnist Claire Van Ryn wrote that a campaign being run by some Green groups on 'preserving the Tarkine' should also then apply to 'preserving the institution of marriage'. Ms Van Ryn claimed that the state government was wilfully throwing away the 'heritage values' of marriage, and that the state government was:

... trying to topple the way things have been for millennia (like the Tarkine) just so that a minority can have a look in.

Her main argument was eloquently dismantled by a young man from Spreyton in Tasmania. Lochsley Wilson, a senior college student, wrote an article for ABC Open to refute Ms Van Ryn's arguments. Regional Tasmania is not known as the most forgiving place for young homosexuals. Things are getting better, but for Lochsley to air his opinion on a major online news source was incredibly brave. Lochsley simply said that everyone can access Tasmania's wilderness but not everyone can access marriage, that this is an issue about people being discriminated against based on their biological characteristics, and that marriage has changed from once not allowing people of different races to be married. Thankfully we have moved on from there. Van Ryn concluded her column by disagreeing with the LGBTI 'lifestyle', whatever that actually means, and not seeing the need for a marriage contract between two loving Australians. Lochsley pointed out that it doesn't matter whether van Ryn approves of the LGBTI lifestyle—that that lifestyle is private; it is the business of no-one but the couple—but that her discriminatory discourse is destructive. It is destructive to the loving same-sex couples who long for a legally recognised wedding, just like everyone else. As long as there is legislated discrimination in our country, it fuels the homophobia that so hurts Robbie, Matt and Lochsley; all decent human beings. That hurts their families and friends.

In concluding my remarks today I quote Tasmanian Labor Premier Lara Giddings who said when introducing a bill for marriage equality in Tasmania:

There comes a time when no amount of excuses should stand in the way of doing what is right.

I believe that allowing same-sex couples the right to legally marry like everyone else is doing what is right. This positive reform will improve the wellbeing of so many of our fellow Australians. This debate is about people. It is about love. It is about growing acceptance in our community. We must comprehensively move to end all legislated discrimination in this country. While it unfortunately will not happen today, we need to continue the campaign. We will one day allow same-sex couples the ability and the honour to celebrate their wedding anniversaries just like I can. One day we will allow them to say to their loved ones, 'Happy wedding anniversary'. I will vote in favour of this bill.