

# The Hon Senator Guy Barnett, Liberal, Tasmania

**Where are our politicians coming from?** What are their beliefs, motivations, agendas and allegiances? It is impossible to know the whole truth about politicians' interests, but much can be gleaned from the public record. Researcher **Chloe Martin** presents a series of information sheets on the religio-political affiliations of Australian politicians.

## Biography

Born 5 April 1962, Launceston, Tasmania. 'Raised as a fifth-generation Tasmanian' on a farm at Hagley in northern Tasmania. (Maiden speech, *Senate Hansard*, 20 March 2002)

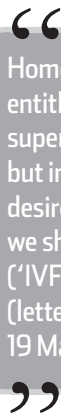
Educated at Launceston and Geelong Grammar Schools and holds LLB, LLM degrees from the University of Tasmania and a graduate diploma from the Australian Institute of Company Directors. After leaving university, he worked as a lawyer in Melbourne with Kevin Andrews, currently Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. (Phillip Hudson 'PM faces a private challenge on a personal issue', *Melbourne Age*, 5 Apr. 2002) He then worked with the Taft Stettinus and Hollister law firm in Washington DC for Australian trade and agricultural interests. During 1988-89, he was Senior Advisor to Tasmanian Premier Robin Gray, after which he established his own public relations and political consultancy, GBA Communications. ([www.aph.gov.au/senate/senators/homepages/senators.asp?id=00auf](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/senators/homepages/senators.asp?id=00auf); Parliamentary biography; maiden speech)

Barnett was on the Liberal Party's Tasmanian State Executive between 1989 and 2001, and the party's Federal Council 1996-2001. In 2002 he was chosen to fill a casual Senate vacancy and held this seat at the 2004 election.

Guy Barnett is married with three children. The family attends the City Baptist Church, Launceston. Barnett has done honorary work for the Baptist Union of Tasmania and was chairman of the church's Sexual Complaints Committee during the late 1990s. (Sarah Green 'The politics of Guy Barnett', *Baptist Advocate*, May 2006, 10)

## Connections

- 1994** Spokesperson for the **Liberal Lawyers Association of Tasmania**; publicly opposed the Commonwealth's proposed overriding of Tasmania's anti-homosexual laws (Australian 26 August 1994, as quoted in Australian League of Rights *On Target*, 2 September 1994)
- 2002** Scheduled speaker on 'The Stem Cell Debate' at **Endeavour Forum** (anti-feminist women's organisation) and **Human Life International** (anti-abortion group) public meeting, 3 October, Melbourne (*Endeavour Forum Newsletter*, Oct. 2002, 1). Scheduled speaker, **Right to Life Australia** (anti-abortion group) conference, 13 July, Melbourne. (Conference flyer)
- 2003** Attended **Fatherhood Foundation** (conservative pro-'fathers' rights' organisation) policy launch, 26 June, Parliament House, Canberra. Later that day, Barnett gave an adjournment speech in the Senate praising the work of the **Fatherhood Foundation** and reading sections of its policy into the record. (*Fatherhood Foundation email newsletter*, 30 June 2003) In his speech, Barnett approvingly quoted Bill Muehlenberg, then National Vice-President of the **National Civic Council's Australian Family Association (AFA)**. (*Senate Hansard*, 26 June 2003)
- 2004** Spoke at introductory session of the **National Marriage Coalition Forum** organised by the **Australian Christian Lobby (ACL)** (social conservative lobby group), **AFA** and **Fatherhood Foundation**, 4 August, Parliament House, Canberra. ([http://www.marriage.org.au/national\\_marriage\\_forum.htm](http://www.marriage.org.au/national_marriage_forum.htm)) The object of the Forum was to have same-sex marriages banned in Australia – Barnett acted as its parliamentary convenor. (*Senate Hansard*, 13 August 2004)
- Played a major role in the subsequent amending of the *Marriage Act* to exclude same-sex marriages. Pressured Prime Minister John Howard via a letter that he persuaded 30 Coalition backbenchers to sign. In his Senate speech, Barnett personally acknowledged the help of Jim Wallace (**ACL**), Warwick and Alison Marsh (**Fatherhood Foundation**) and Bill Muehlenberg (**AFA**). (*Senate Hansard*, 13 August 2004)
- Prior to the October 2004 federal election, the **ACL** described Barnett and Senator Eric Abetz as 'some of our strongest supporters'. (*ACL National Newsletter*, September 2004, 2)
- 2005** Campaigning to restrict internet pornography, again specifically acknowledging 'organisations and individuals who hold similar concerns to my own on this issue', namely Warwick and Alison Marsh (**Fatherhood Foundation**), Bill Muehlenberg (**AFA**) and Jim Wallace (**ACL**). (*Senate Hansard*, 8 December 2005)
- 2006** Campaigning for anti-pornography filters on library computers, Barnett relied heavily on a controversial **AFA** survey, rejected by the Australian Library and Information Association. (<http://alia.org.au/media.room/2006.03.31.html>)
- Barnett successfully campaigned for the Federal Government to overturn Australian Capital Territory same-sex civil unions legislation. Jim Wallace of **ACL** wrote that 'great thanks should be given to the Prime Minister, Attorney General Philip Ruddock and Senator Guy Barnett (Liberal Tas.) who were predominantly responsible for the victory.' (*ACL National Newsletter*, June 2006, 1)
- Parliamentary Convenor, 'Australian Christian Heritage' National Forum (*Age*, 4 August 2006). While this forum was attended by a wide variety of Christians, Barnett was surrounded by friends from the **AFA**, **ACL**, **Festival of Light** (social conservative organisation), **National Alliance of Christian Leaders** (Christian conservative 'umbrella' group) and similar bodies. (<http://australianchristianheritageforum.org.au/>)



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## In his own words

[Embryonic stem cell research] is a scary proposal with mind-boggling possibilities that has the potential to damage our strongly held perception of human dignity and fracture the backbone of Australia's conscience. ('Human Embryo and Human Dignity', John Mark Ministries - <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/1273.htm> - 8 April 2002)

[Opposing single women and lesbians being allowed access to IVF programs] I know my stand is fodder for all those who want to brand us the religious right, but I cannot compromise on what I see as fundamentally and morally vital. ('Tasmanian Baptist in Federal Parliament', *Family World News*, August 2002, 15)

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[F]or the unsuspecting child, the X-rated magazines at newsagents can be hidden from their view, but a pornographic image can fill their screen in a flash on the internet. (*Senate Hansard*, December 2005)

I believe the [internet] system should default automatically in favour of protecting our children before we start considering the rights of adults. (ibid.)

[Regarding cloning embryos for therapeutic purposes] [T]here should be a ban on cloning because cloning is cloning is cloning and this so-called therapeutic cloning is in fact that, it is cloning... So-called therapeutic cloning is actually cloning and I'm not sure that the community would wish to support that, because in my view the ends [do] not justify the means, and life applies within strict boundaries and I think this is pushing the boundary too far... (ABC AM - 'Call for cloning ban to be lifted to divide Liberals', 20 December 2005 - <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2005/s1534629.htm>)

[Regarding the RU 486 drug] Pro-abortionists want the drug for destroying the life of an unborn baby. (*Senate Hansard*, 9 February 2006)

Federal funding is provided [for abortions] without any requirement for independent counselling – and by 'independent' I mean from a non-abortion provider – and without any requirement for informed consent or a cooling-off period. In my view, this is appalling public policy ... By passing this bill [removing the Health Minister's veto power over RU 486] we will send all the wrong messages to young Australians – that abortion is no big deal... " (ibid.)

The protection of the traditional institution of marriage in 2004 was a great win for the future of our children. It protected the rights of children to have both a mother and a father. ('ACT Civil Union Laws an Attack on Marriage Act', media release, 29 March 2006)

Marriage is a bedrock institution worthy of protection ... Marriage is a rock solid institution. It is not a fashion to be updated. (ibid.)

[Regarding internet filters] I called on the Tasmanian Government last year to ban pornography access from their internet sites and received an entirely unsatisfactory response. Now I call on libraries across Australia to stop providing these terrible avenues of exploitation of our children. ('Public Libraries Fail to Protect Children from Internet Pornography', media release, 30 March 2006)

## Of note

'Accepted Jesus' at the age of 8. Had a dream as a little boy to be a member of Federal Parliament 'and now I am living the dream'. (Green op. cit.)

In 1997, Barnett was diagnosed with type 1, or insulin-dependent diabetes. (Maiden speech) His father died of motor neurone disease. Owing to the genetic components in both diseases, Barnett agrees that his own children might conceivably benefit from embryonic stem cell research but rejects this possibility as '[t]he ends do not justify the means?'. ('Human embryo and human dignity', op. cit. - <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/1273.htm>)

On being appointed to the Senate in 2002, Barnett's first major political move was to oppose Prime Minister Howard's heavily qualified support for embryonic stem cell research. Asserting that 'life starts as a human embryo and they deserve respect and honour', Barnett considered introducing a private member's bill to block all such research, even on excess IVF embryos. (Hudson op. cit.) Barnett is now one of the most visible government backbenchers and widely regarded as a strong ministerial contender.

An attempt was made to have Barnett's name replace that of state colleague Senator Eric Abetz in the number 1 spot on the Tasmanian Liberal Senate ticket for the 2004 election. Abetz survived the coup attempt by a whisker. (<http://www.crikey.com.au/articles/2003/11/10-0001.html>) He had lobbied for some years to help Barnett get into Parliament and was reportedly 'puzzled' by the incident. Barnett told the *Age*: To suggest that a rookie senator of less than two years would try to knock off a veteran minister is ludicrous – We've been friends since university days. ('What a team guy', *Age*, 8 December 2004)

Unlike most other conservative Protestant politicians, Barnett is a committed republican. ('Guy Barnett: Australianise our honours system' *Weekend Australian*, 12 June 2006)

**As far as possible, all information has been derived from the original sources specified in the text. Various collections of documentary and online information have been consulted.**