



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**BILLS**

**Plebiscite (Same-Sex Marriage) Bill 2016**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 7 November 2016**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Lambie, Sen Jacqui	<b>Question No.</b>

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**Senator LAMBIE** (Tasmania) (17:42): I rise to support the Plebiscite (Same-Sex Marriage) Bill 2016. I would have preferred if the question about gay marriage were put at the last election. The nation would have been saved a lot of time and money. However, I still believe that a national plebiscite is justified and needed in order to test the will or conscience of the Australian people on gay marriage. I also believe that this plebiscite will take away any doubt about how the Australian people feel towards gay marriage and will therefore lead to a quicker healing and acceptance of the outcome for those on the losing side of the debate. When it comes to gay marriage, even though I indicated before both previous elections that I am opposed to it for sacred religious reasons, I will vote according to the will of the Tasmanian people as indicated in any plebiscite of the Australian people.

I strongly oppose any discrimination against the LGBTI community. LGBTI Australians are very important and valued members of our community. My understanding is that in 2008 many pieces of legislation—nearly 80—were passed in federal parliament to stop any discrimination of people based on their sexuality. I support that legislation and would also support any strengthening of federal laws if gaps were found in anti-discrimination legislation.

However, when it comes to marriage, I consider it a sacred Christian tradition between a man and a woman, and as a Christian I would feel discriminated against if my sacred religious tradition were interfered with and changed by politicians. I understand that many people have strong views on this issue, and I may be on the losing side of the community debate; however, should a bill be placed before parliament on this matter without first testing the conscience of the Australian people with a plebiscite or a referendum, I would vote according to my conscience on this matter. I am sorry if my religious views have offended the LGBTI community but, just as non-Christian religious traditions are expected to be respected by all Australians, I would like my sacred Christian traditions respected as well.

Tasmanian Catholic Archbishop Doyle wrote a letter which is relevant to this important debate. It reads, in part:

However, in addition to ‘human rights’ there are also ‘human responsibilities’. We are all blessed by God with the gift of our sexuality. The design itself comes from the Creator of Life and we all have a responsibility to follow that design.

The Church firmly believes that marriage is founded on the wonderful fact of sexual difference and its potential for new life. Without this there would be no human beings and no future. Bringing new human life into the world is founded on the loving union of male and female. Children are best nurtured by a mother and father.

Opposing this legislation in no way implies that the Church accepts discrimination against the human rights of another. Nor does it mean the Church fails to understand the complex nature of human sexual identity and desire.

It implies no lack of respect for people who identify as ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’. Many in our community have friends or family members who are gay and lesbian, who are people we know and love, and are part of our family and friendship groups.

However my concern is for the future of our whole society and I ask you to reflect seriously and to pray about the ramifications for current and future generations, of legislation which completely redefines marriage.

A grave mistake will be made if such legislation is enacted in Tasmania. The state government, and indeed even the federal government, cannot redefine the natural institution of marriage, a union between a man and a woman. The government can regulate marriage, but this natural institution existed long before there were any governments and cannot be changed at will.

I acknowledge the points made from different senators regarding the cost to the taxpayer of this non-binding vote. I am also concerned about obtaining best value for taxpayers' money when organising and funding this important national vote.

However, there are two other time-sensitive issues which are equally important social issues to gay marriage and have been put in the too-hard basket for too long. They have been put on the backburner. The will and conscience of the Australian people should also be tested on these, firstly, the issue of Indigenous recognition and, secondly, euthanasia of terminally ill Australians. For the critics who may say that I am muddying the waters on gay marriage I would say, 'Don't treat the Australian people like bloody fools,' because they are clearly not. Most people have either already made up their minds on these three social issues, and want a vote as soon as possible or can manage a public debate on multiple matters of great public importance. In other words, Australians can walk and chew gum at the same time.

There may be some who think that euthanasia for the terminally ill is a new issue. To those people I would simply ask: when was the last time you spent time with a terminally ill person, the relative of a terminally ill person or thought about whether terminally ill Australians should have the right to a merciful death?

Today we have an opportunity to once and for all put into place a quick chain of events which will finally answer, in the next few months, the question about gay marriage in Australia. I urge all members to take advantage of this important opportunity. If we do not take this opportunity now then this issue will not be resolved for years. That situation may politically benefit some in this chamber. To those who oppose a quick national vote on gay marriage, which would be enabled by this plebiscite, I ask: are you really doing it for the benefit of gay people or are you using the pretext of care for gay people's health and mental wellbeing to ensure that you lock in what you think will be a political advantage at the next election?

It is my strong view that an unnecessary wait will do more harm to the gay people than a short public debate over the next few months, followed by a national vote and subsequent legislation which reflects the will of the majority of Australians. An unnecessary wait on the issue of gay marriage will also prolong public debate and distract attention from other important life-and-death social issues—for example, involuntary treatment of drug addicted children, serious lack of jobs, out-of-control living costs, cuts to aged care and an overstretched public health system. The list is large and it goes on and on.

I have made this point before in this place; however, it is worth making it again: many elected representatives have argued against this plebiscite by essentially saying that the debate would cause young gay people to take their own lives and open the floodgates of hate. I am forced to remind those people of a famous quote by Pericles of Athens, which was made about 400 years before Christ was born. That quote is written on a wall not far from this chamber, and it says:

We Athenians make decisions for ourselves, or at least participate in the full discussion of them: for we do not regard debate as a barrier to effective action, but a necessary condition for acting wisely.

My advice to those politicians who are trying to blackmail the Australian public, in a very juvenile and dangerous manner, into not having a national debate and not supporting this plebiscite on gay marriage is this: the question of gay marriage must be put before the people of Australia, and no barrier must be placed in the way of this debate by the Australian people. Australia is a mature democracy, which should not shy away from this debate.

After the people have had their say, no matter what the result, there will be people who, for very good and legitimate reasons, will have very hurt feelings—whichever side they are on. If a plebiscite of the people is used to test Australia's conscience on this matter then whoever is on the losing side of the debate will be in no doubt about the will of the Australian people and will be able to heal, unite and move on a lot more quickly.

In many ways some of the arguments against supporting this legislation are arguments against free speech in our democracy. In AC Grayling's book *Towards the Light* on page 62, when the discussion is about Milton's views on marriage and divorce, Grayling writes:

The people can be trusted to arrive at truth and flush out error better than a few appointed officials whose timidity or arrogance might make them silence truth to the detriment of all.

Grayling then draws our attention to Milton, who wrote:

Let truth and falsehood grapple ... truth is strong.

Grayling points out that:

The grappling is important, for truth emerges from contests with error, needing exercise just as virtue does.

Just as we senators are able to put our points of view and test what we believe is true and sacred about marriage in this great chamber of debate, so too must we give all Australians the opportunity to put their points of view and test what they believe is true and sacred about marriage in an even greater chamber of debate: the Australia beyond this parliament and the local ballot boxes where people of this great democracy can have their say. I fully support this legislation.