

## Qld parliament decriminalises surrogacy

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### **AAP**

Queensland's parliament has decriminalised surrogacy after opposition MPs were branded rednecks, knuckle draggers and bigots over views they aired in the debate.

The laws passed 48 votes to 40 late on Thursday after just over 17 hours of debate, in which parliament heard concerns about the practicalities of surrogate parents using public toilets, and the possibility of surrogacy being used for "convenience".

Government MPs were given a rare conscience vote on whether to decriminalise altruistic surrogacy, where a woman has another couple's child for no payment.

Commercial surrogacy remains illegal under the new law.

Under the reforms, which extend to same-sex couples, legal parentage of a child born in surrogacy agreements will transfer from the birth mother to the parent or parents who commissioned the birth.

An opposition bill that would see surrogacy continue to be illegal for same-sex couples was debated at the same time, but failed to pass.

Liberal National Party (LNP) MPs were given a conscience vote on their own bill only.

Christian and family groups made a last-ditch effort to lobby MPs to vote down the government bill when the debate began on Wednesday.

That day's debate featured the contribution of opposition frontbencher Ray Hopper, who worried the bill would see same-sex parents using babies like "pets" to gain popularity, and lead to confusion at public toilets.

On Thursday, opposition MP for Coomera Michael Crandon suggested surrogacy could be used as a "convenience" for women who do not want to put their careers on hold.

"I can imagine a case where a woman chooses not to have a child for social reasons, not medical," Mr Crandon said.

"It may be that the woman has a career and does not want a break in that career that carrying and giving birth to a child may cause."

Premier Anna Bligh told reporters those views were an embarrassment to the state, which she believed to be more modern and progressive than the debate would suggest.

"What we've seen from the LNP are bizarre and irrational arguments ... even more bizarre, the LNP have decided not to give their members a conscience vote," Ms Bligh said.

"This means that the good old National Party, the rednecks of Queensland politics, are binding the former Liberals."

Speaking in support of the bill, Treasurer Andrew Fraser called Mr Hopper a "knuckle dragger" and slammed opposition MPs for not speaking out against his views.

"By their silence they condone the bigotry being peddled ... they condemn children to be second class citizens," he said.

But Deputy Opposition Leader Lawrence Springborg said Labor had been "patronising" to the gay community by tackling an issue that was not high on their agenda, while ignoring others.

He was also angered by Labor's treatment of those opposing the bill, including religious and family groups, and Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane John Bathersby.

"Why is it that those who oppose the government's bill are lampooned by Labor as religious crackpots or throwbacks?" Mr Springborg said.

Two Labor MPs - Capalaba MP Michael Choi and Albert MP Margaret Keech - spoke against the bill, believing children benefited most from having a man and woman as parents.

Queensland is the last Australian state to decriminalise altruistic surrogacy, which had been punishable by a \$10,000 fine or three years' imprisonment.

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