



Speech by

Barbara Stone

MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD

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SURROGACY BILL; FAMILY (SURROGACY) BILL

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (11.56 am): I rise to participate in this debate today—and I intend to be brief, because I do not want to repeat any of what has already been said by my Labor colleagues. However, I want to address the definition of 'family'. I have sat here and heard the LNP members over and over again define a family as a mother, father and the kids. I have heard them say how this is the only family structure, the only combination of family that will provide kids with the ability to shine and become the best adults possible with the brightest future. We have heard in this debate, and in other debates in this House, from members who have not been brought up in the traditional family structure and who have actually done quite well in life, including having long and loving marriages, raising kids and working in careers of their choice before being elected. So I do not think only the traditional family can provide the best outcomes for children.

I have heard the LNP members quote research on the traditional family. I would say that that research is probably correct, because the research they were referring to probably had very narrow, defined terms. But if you throw in very different variables—variables from out there in the real world—I would suggest that the research outcomes would be quite different.

But it was the member for Gympie who really demonstrated the love of family. After reading his speech, I think it would be fair to say that, while he lived in the traditional family structure, it was not quite the ideal childhood. But no matter what happened he loved his family—he never wanted to be in another—which demonstrates something that I have said before in this House: a young child accepts their family no matter what the structure. At the end of the day, when they walk through the door they regard the people who live in that home as their family—their family who is taking care of them. I also want to say to the member for Gympie that it is a good person who can forgive, and I am pleased that he and his family were able to heal and get on with life as a family.

I ask members to think back to when they were children. They did not understand that there were different family structures. In fact, if we start thinking about how we would have described our neighbourhood or, if we lived in a rural area, the neighbours who lived in the streets close by, we probably would have said something like, 'Well, that's John and Mary's house next door,' or, 'John and Mary live in that house,' or, 'Simon my friend from school lives with his mother in that house there,' or, 'Down the road is Mr and Mrs Smith and I think Billy is now there but I don't know where Annie is,' and, 'There's Sharon and Sue, who live in the blue house,' and, 'My friend Mary lives with her mum and dad, pop and nan.' A kid would not have said, 'The couple next door are a childless couple', or 'Billy has been kicked out by Annie so he has moved back home', or 'Sharon and Sue are a same-sex couple', and, 'How strange Mary's nan and pop live with them.' A kid accepts households and families no matter what the structure. That is why it is so hard for our child services officers when they remove a child from their parents. In that child's eyes, no matter what those parents have done that is their mother, that is their father—no matter what. When a surrogacy arrangement has been made and a baby is handed over to their family they, too, will accept and love and be proud of their family no matter what that family structure is.

If we were talking about an adoption of a 10-year-old to a same-sex couple then I believe it would be fair to say, yes, there would be challenges, challenges for both the adults and the child, and there would be

a time period of adjustment. But I also say that would happen with any adoption of an older child. It is the disapproving remarks and views of people in the LNP's definition of traditional family that make families that are not of the traditional structure feel inadequate. It is those remarks that make children feel that they do not belong or have a chance to succeed. They are made to feel like second-class citizens. I am not surprised there are a number of kids who go off the rails; kids who do not come from the house with the white picket fence, a mum, a dad, a dog, a cat, two cars and a number of computers. The expectations placed on them from those with that strong narrow view of family is a huge pressure, a pressure that they should not have to endure.

There can be a lot of people in a family or perhaps there can be only two. A family contains people who love you, keep you safe, who are there for the good times and the bad, help you through the sad times and laugh with you during the happy times. That is what defines a family, not its structure. How many times have members heard people say 'They treat me like family', or 'They look after me better than my own family.' I do not believe for one minute that any one of us in this House can say that it was only their mum and dad who raised them. I bet if members really thought about it there were a number of people who assisted or shaped their upbringing: grandparents, aunts, uncles and neighbours. The member for Woodridge also mentioned how the church family can play a large role.

When I was listening to the old story of a traditional family of mum, dad and the kids, it reminded me of what people referred to as 'the good old days', the days when the doors and windows were quickly shut and people ignored the yelling and screaming from the neighbour's house. Those were the days when people turned a blind eye to domestic violence. It just did not exist. It was better to put up with the abuse than be a family without a mother or a father. They were the days when child sexual abuse was never raised. Once again the expectations of families staying together were stronger than the support given to the victim or other family members during this time. I hope that we never return to those days. I hope families of all shapes and sizes continue to exist, be unconditionally accepted and flourish in our communities.

There is another reason we need to start accepting a broader definition of family. Not too long ago I remember reading some statistics about the Australian population. I remember that one particular figure stood out to me: there were 50,000 more single women in the age group of 25 to 45 than single men in that age group in Australia. The article went on to say that those women will find it difficult to find a partner in Australia and, in fact, may never have a long-term relationship. Some will never have the opportunity to marry and have a baby. The *Australian* newspaper on 24 January 2007 wrote—

Single women wondering where all the good men have gone, your suspicions have been confirmed: there are almost 100,000 more women than blokes in Australia.

...

...the ABS figures showing there were 97,000 more females than males in 2005.

When this bill was introduced into the parliament I thought about those figures again and I thought about how we will have to start thinking differently and become more accepting of single-parent households. The member for Burnett said single women were just lazy and did not put in the effort to find a husband and have a child. These figures make a mockery out of the member for Burnett's speech and, in fact, proves he is the one who is lazy. I also thought how wonderful this bill is that it will provide an opportunity for some of those women to be able to fulfil their desire to have a child and raise a loving family.

I want to thank all the people who contacted me either by written correspondence or phone and told me their views. In regard to those people who were against this bill, some of the correspondence was quite appalling, showed no compassion for those who do not meet their expectations of how they want them to live their life and showed no empathy towards their fellow human beings. There were also a number of letters or calls from people against the bill who were able to put forward their views in a respectful manner and showed they genuinely cared. There was also a number of people who were for the bill and I also thank them for raising their views with me. However, I believe the state member for Burleigh put it very eloquently when she said something along the lines of that it is not the job of this government or any politician to force a set of religious standards or dictate parenting styles.

I know this bill will bring joy to some wonderful people who would never have had the chance to have a child and raise a family. More importantly, I hope that this bill brings about a more unconditional accepting of family regarding its structure. I commend the bill to the House.