



Gay Dads Australia

a resource for gay dads and those
who are thinking of becoming dads

Couples demand right to be husbands and wives



There were kisses and cuddles all round yesterday as 55 gay and lesbian couples gathered in front of State Parliament. The mass commitment ceremony was to call for gay civil unions to be recognised.

Photo: *Justin McManus*

Lorna Edwards
August 14, 2006

SHARON Clements and Fiona Sproles held hands as they exchanged vows on the crowded steps of Parliament.

They were one of 55 gay and lesbian couples to take part in a mass commitment ceremony yesterday calling for gay civil unions to be recognised.

The Armadale couple made another commitment. They said they would keep renewing their vows until they carried some legal weight, after first unofficially tying the knot in 2004.

"Every year we are going to keep doing this until we can do it legally," Ms Sproles said. "We have lived together for three years, we both have wedding rings and yet because our relationship is not recognised, we still get people referring to 'your special friend'. But we call each other wives."

A crowd of 2000, twice the number organisers expected, turned up to call on federal and state governments to legalise gay civil unions.

Newly independent state MP Andrew Olexander, who was expelled by the Liberals after he called the party

homophobic, announced to rousing cheers that he would introduce a private member's bill to allow gay couples the same rights as heterosexuals.

"Like all other Victorians, we fall in love and we commit ourselves to devoted, long-term relationships," he said.

"Mr Bracks, you have the opportunity to become a leader of historical significance."

State Labor backbencher Tony Lupton, whose Prahran electorate has a large gay population, said he supported gay civil unions, despite the Premier's insistence that the issue is not on the agenda before the November state election.

The Democrats and Greens also voiced their support for same-sex civil unions at the gay rights protest, one of many held around Australia yesterday.

A gay parent at the rally lamented that last week's census did not include categories for gay couples to acknowledge their relationships.

The co-convenor of the Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, Ron Thiele, said most Australians supported recognition for same-sex relationships.

"Equal recognition of relationships is good for individuals, good for families, good for society and good for the economy," he said.

He renewed his vows with his partner of 18 years, Robert Salinas, 14 years after their first unrecognised wedding.

"We had a marriage ceremony in 1992 with a Catholic priest on the lawn of my parents' house, but of course none of that is recognised by the state or Commonwealth Government," he said.

"We are happily settled, we love each other, we are really one person, but they don't recognise our relationship as being legitimate."

For Andrew Dutton, 28, and his boyfriend, Elvis Caus, 26, taking part in yesterday's ceremony was a form of protest they hoped would be a rehearsal for a legal ceremony one day.

"We want equal acknowledgement of our relationship and all the financial issues that affect us, such as joint tax returns, Medicare and superannuation," Mr Dutton said.

STATE OF PLAY

STEVE BRACKS

The ALP Premier says gay civil unions are not on the agenda in the lead-up to the November election.

TED BAILLIEU

The Liberal Opposition Leader surprised many by controversially supporting gay civil unions.

ANDREW OLEXANDER

In what may be the disgraced former Liberal MP's last political stand, he has proposed a private member's bill to give gay couples the same legal rights as married heterosexuals.

Source: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/couples-demand-right-to-be-husbands-and-wives/2006/08/13/1155407670310.html>