

December 2011 - January 2012

Labor endorses same-sex marriage as party policy

"Advocates of same sex marriage in the ALP made much of the fact that the party shouldn't be on the wrong side of history, but in defiance of their leader Julia Gillard, they have chosen to be on the wrong side of truth," ACL's Managing Director Jim Wallace said in relation to the ALP National Conference passing a motion to adopt a policy of marriage being between any two people.

The Prime Minister will allow MPs a conscience vote on the issue, if a bill is introduced into parliament.

Mr Wallace said the party's decision betrays the party's commitment to the Christian constituency made two weeks before the 2010 election that the Marriage Act would not change if Labor were re-elected.

In a video with ACL's Managing Director Jim Wallace, Ms Gillard said: "The Marriage Act will stay unchanged, so marriage will be defined as it is in our current Marriage Act as between a man and a woman...that's the party policy... And that's what you should expect if we're re-elected."

Mr Wallace recognised the resolve of some Labor delegates to speak out in support for marriage.

"There are many good people in the Labor party who showed great courage to oppose this change and who we will continue to support as individuals. But Labor's granting of a conscience vote on this issue does not change the statement this policy change makes on its values as a Party, and the degree to which we can trust its election promises," he said.

"The values of the Party on this are now clear, but the only way for it to recover its integrity on this issue is to vote with the Coalition as a party to defeat any private members bill in this parliament, and then seek a mandate for this platform change at the next federal election," he said.

100,000 sign marriage petition

A petition of 100,586 Australians urging Labor not to break its election promise on marriage was recently handed to ALP delegates who attended the ALP National Conference.

ACL Managing Director Jim Wallace said the Australian Marriage Forum (AMF) petition (<http://australianmarriage.org/>) would continue beyond the ALP conference in the lead-up to any Parliamentary debate.

"This petition has only been running for six-and-a-half weeks and this is just the beginning of what we believe will be a large groundswell of people who expect Labor to honour its election promise," Mr Wallace told conference delegates on the 1st of December in Sydney.

It's a poor reflection on the ALP that perhaps the largest petition ever by the church failed to convince it, and despite strong support by some delegates.

Labor to lose seats

The Managing Director of the ACL, Jim Wallace, said Labor's endorsement of same-sex marriage would cost it seats.



We all felt betrayed to see that the ALP would turn its back on the definition of marriage, but particularly that it would do it by breaking such a clearly given promise before the last election.

While we have to acknowledge that the PM tried to keep that promise by personally voting against it, as did some very brave delegates, the reality is that it was a promise given on behalf of the ALP, which she confirmed unequivocally in the words on this page.

At this point in time the Coalition is clearly differentiated from Labor on this very important issue, a definition that if changed cannot be changed back - you can't un-marry people.

The promise the Coalition made was "to strongly oppose any action that would alter the status of marriage." This clearly means the Party must vote as a block to defeat any bill on same sex marriage, as to do otherwise would be to similarly betray its promise as a party.

Tony Abbott has just confirmed his and the Party's position in favour of marriage in a WA Community Forum in Brand.

But with the certainty of a conscience vote on it in 2012, we need them to vote as a party. It is the fact it is party policy and our expectation that they will honour this that makes them different.

So please let your local Coalition politician know that this is what you expect.

And have a blessed Christmas.

Jim Wallace AM
Managing Director



PM Julia Gillard spoke to ACL's MD Jim Wallace in the lead up to the 2010 election in which she said, "the Marriage Act will remain unchanged...if we're re-elected".



MD Jim Wallace addresses some ALP National Conference delegates about the petition

A breakdown of the petition signatories from each electorate shows there are enough petition signatories in key marginals for Labor to lose those seats.

These include the Greenway electorate in New South Wales, Moreton in Queensland and Deakin and Corangamite in Victoria. Other electorates such as Banks, Lindsay and Robertson in New South Wales and La Trobe in Victoria are very close to having enough signatures for Labor to lose those seats as well.

MD Jim Wallace shakes hands with some ALP delegates, who support marriage between a man and woman, after handing over the petition.



ACTION | Sign the marriage petition if you haven't already, www.australianmarriage.org/petition

(Continued on page 2)



(Continued from page 1)

20 senior church leaders support marriage

On the eve of Labor's historic vote on marriage, 20 of Australia's senior church and denominational leaders urged the Government to protect the definition of marriage in Australian law.

The Joint Statement began: *Marriage is the lifelong commitment and faithful union of one man and one woman. As such, marriage is the natural basis of the family because it secures the relationship between biological parents and their children. As Christian leaders representing different denominations or churches, we join together and affirm our shared commitment to promote and protect marriage. We honour the unique love between husbands and wives; the vital place of fathers and mothers in the life of children; and the corresponding ideal for all children to know the love and role modelling of a father and mother.*

ACTION | Read the full statement online at www.acl.org.au

New research reveals the importance of marriage

New research, commissioned by the Ambrose Centre for Religious Liberty, has found that while a slim majority of Australians say they support same-sex marriage "in-principle", most do not think the Government should rush into changing the *Marriage Act* while we still do not understand the full social implications.

Although 58% of people say they support the rights of same-sex couples to marry, only 49% support changing the *Marriage Act* and only 35% believe in pursuing the issue if it's going to be divisive.

There is also a sense of cognitive dissonance - with nearly three quarters (73%) agreeing that wherever possible society should ensure that children are raised by their natural mother and father, and promote this ideal.

Changing the *Marriage Act* is also very low on the priority list of most Australians, including those who support such a change.

Qld Gov't rushes through Civil Partnerships Bill

In the lead up to the ALP National Conference the Queensland Government passed the Civil Partnerships Bill 2011 in a bid to put pressure on the conference to endorse same-sex marriage.

ACL's Queensland Director Wendy Francis was in Parliament House to witness the passing of the bill on Wednesday the 30th of November, which was passed by a margin of 47 votes to 40.

Labor MPs were allowed a conscience vote on the issue, but the LNP voted as a Party against it.

In her opening comments, Premier Anna Bligh said that Queensland was in danger of becoming run by "religious extremists" in referring to the LNP's decision to vote as a block.

Labor MPs including Health Minister Geoff

Wilson, Michael Choi and Margaret Keech all voted against the bill and gave speeches as to why they couldn't support it.

Rationalising away a heinous crime should be a wake-up call for civil society

"When a powerful former public figure walks free after having sex with a 12 year old girl, there is something terribly wrong with our criminal justice system," said ACL's Tasmanian Director Mark Brown.

Mr Brown was referring to the recent decision in the Supreme Court in Hobart to free former MLC Terry Martin, who even escaped having his name recorded on a sex offender register.

"The legal system's ability to rationalise away even the most heinous abuse of a young girl and to blame factors other than the perpetrator shows a disturbing departure from the essentials of civil society and child protection," he said.

"For the protection of girls and children there must be severe consequences for men who abuse them," he said.

Churches say poker machine reform will continue

Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce Chair, Rev Tim Costello said he has no doubt the Government will continue its poker machine reforms, despite the recent changes made in the House of Representatives.

Speaking shortly after Liberal Party member Peter Slipper replaced the ALP's Harry Jenkins as Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rev Costello remained confident that the Prime Minister and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin would not cave in to pressure from the poker machine industry.

Reverend Costello said that by releasing Harry Jenkins from the job, he was able to join his ALP colleagues on the backbench, delivering more certainty in terms of numbers to the fragile minority Government.

"With stronger numbers in the House, contentious legislation like the Government's proposed poker machine reforms stand a better chance of getting up," Rev Costello said.

"The Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce will continue its advocacy on this important issue in the interests of some of the most vulnerable Australians, their families, and the communities in which they live."

NSW Gov't sets minimum time for SRE in schools

The New South Wales State Government recently announced plans to set minimum length of time for the teaching of religious classes in schools.

In a story in the *Daily Telegraph*, Education

Minister Adrian Piccoli said that, "other activities have encroached on the delivery of special religious education" (SRE).

A minimum time of 30 minutes of meaningful teaching time per week in primary schools, and a minimum of one period of meaningful teaching time per week in secondary schools for Special Religious Education has now been set.

Qld Gov't must reject abortion law push

The ACL has called on the Queensland Government to retain the remaining protections for the unborn and to reject the calls of those who would seek to liberalise abortion law in the state without first taking this as policy to an election.

"It would be intolerable if such anti-democratic actions were taken on the abortion issue given how passionately people felt about it, and the impact that any change would have on vulnerable women and their children," said ACL's Queensland Director Wendy Francis.

Current Queensland laws do still provide support for some women who feel pressured into having an abortion.

ACL believes a priority for any law reform on abortion should be to provide assistance to women with unsupported pregnancy, enhance the protections for the unborn including banning partial birth abortion and to gather accurate statistics, as recommended by a 2008 Senate Inquiry.

Senate condemns religious persecution

In an important act of unanimity, the Australian Senate has passed two motions condemning violence towards Christians in the Middle East.

In a resolution passed unanimously and sponsored by the Government's Senator Glenn Sterle and the Opposition's Senator David Fawcett, the Senate called on the Australian Government to speak out about the plight of Egypt's Coptic Community.

Senators condemned, "the tragic violence towards Coptic Christians in Egypt," and expressed, "grave concerns for the safety of Copts in Egypt." They also called Government to make representations on behalf of a Christian Pastor in Iran, Youcef Nadarkhani, sentenced to death for the crime of apostasy.

Labor commits to increase refugee intake

In one bright spot from the ALP Conference the party agreed to increase the refugee intake from 13,750 to 20,000.

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