

**MARRIAGE EQUALITY PLEBISCITE — FEDERAL GOVERNMENT —
ELECTION COMMITMENT**

Motion

HON NICK GOIRAN (South Metropolitan) [11.35 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house —

- (a) acknowledges the undertaking given by the Turnbull coalition government that if re-elected it would instigate a plebiscite on the definition of marriage;
- (b) notes the overwhelming vote of Western Australians for the Turnbull coalition at the 2016 federal election;
- (c) commends the Turnbull coalition for its public statements since its re-election recommitting to fulfil its undertaking; and
- (d) calls on the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia to facilitate the fulfilment of the undertaking by giving to the people of this state a say on the definition of marriage and approve a plebiscite.

As I speak in support of this motion this morning, I will do what members opposite are consistently unwilling to do—that is, to provide evidence in support of statements made. It simply is not good enough for members to consistently make assertions without providing anything on which to substantiate those statements. The first limb of this morning's motion refers to an undertaking. It is right and proper for this assertion to be scrutinised. It simply is not good enough for me to say that someone has given an undertaking without being able to defend that assertion. Three questions could rightly be asked: firstly, what undertaking was given; secondly, who gave this undertaking; and, thirdly, when did they give this undertaking?

In order to answer all three of these reasonable questions, I remind honourable members of the first time Hon Malcolm Turnbull, MP, gave an undertaking on the marriage plebiscite. On 15 September last year, during his first question time as Prime Minister, Hon Malcolm Turnbull was asked a question without notice regarding a private member's bill that had been introduced to the House of Representatives seeking to redefine marriage. The member for Sydney, who was and is the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, asked whether the Prime Minister would allow parliamentary time for the bill to be voted on. I will quote from the *Hansard* of the House of Representatives on 15 September 2015. Prime Minister Turnbull responded by saying —

Marriage equality, or same-sex marriage, is a very significant issue on which people of good faith, the best faith, honestly have different opinions ... Historically, issues of this type have been resolved in parliament by free votes ... Another way of dealing with this is by a vote of the people.

There were then some interjections and further discussion. In answer to the question, he later concluded —

At the next election, Australians will have a choice. The Labor Party will say, 'Vote for us and marriage equality will be dealt with by the politicians, by the parliament, in a free vote after the election.' And we will say, 'If we're re-elected to government, every single Australian will have a say.'

During the course of his first term as Prime Minister, and in the lead-up to the 2016 federal election, Prime Minister Turnbull continued to hold fast to his undertaking. This was clearly evident in his remarks during the online leaders' debate in Sydney on Thursday, 17 June 2016. Page 16 of that transcript states —

... my party decided, prior to my becoming Prime Minister, to have a plebiscite. It was a decision of the Government. I have to say—not that we politicians ever look at opinion polls—but every poll I've seen shows very strong support for the proposition that Australians should have a say, so it has been offered to them and promised to them and we will deliver a plebiscite.

The plainness of the Prime Minister's words left no doubt in anyone's mind. It was crystal clear that if the Liberal–National coalition government were re-elected, it would deliver a plebiscite on the issue of marriage. Importantly, the Prime Minister's remarks ensured that the promised plebiscite would be an election issue that voters could take into account when casting their votes.

I move to the second limb of this morning's motion, which asserts that Western Australians overwhelmingly voted in favour of the Turnbull coalition at the federal election. Again it is right and proper that this assertion be scrutinised. It is not good enough for me to say that the Liberal and National Parties have overwhelming support in our state if I am unable or unwilling to defend that assertion. On 2 July this year, Western Australians joined their fellow citizens east of the Nullarbor and exercised their democratic right to have a say in who should be given the responsibility and honour of governing the nation. There is no doubt that Western Australians

overwhelmingly voted in favour of the Turnbull coalition. I provide three key statistics in support of this statement: firstly, the Liberal Party won 11 of the 16 House of Representatives seats; secondly, the Liberal Party secured 45.7 per cent of first-preference votes; and, thirdly, the Liberal Party recorded an outstanding two-party preferred result of 54.66 per cent. It is evident from those statistics that a clear majority of Western Australians supported the Turnbull coalition; it follows that the majority of Western Australians supported the undertaking to deliver a plebiscite on marriage.

I move to the third limb of the motion, which asserts that the Turnbull federal government is recommitted to fulfilling its undertaking since its re-election. As with the first two limbs of the motion, this third limb warrants the same degree of scrutiny. It is unsatisfactory for unsupported statements to be made to this house. Since last month's federal election, the Turnbull coalition government has on numerous occasions continued to express its support and commitment to its undertaking to deliver a plebiscite on marriage. Indeed, in an interview with Leigh Sales on ABC's 7.30 on 18 July—again, for the benefit of *Hansard*, I am quoting directly from the transcript of that interview—the Prime Minister said —

... we will bring that legislation forward in the course of this year.

He went on to say —

... we would like the plebiscite to be held as soon as practicable, but again, that will depend on when the legislation is passed.

As recently as last Friday, during a radio interview with Neil Mitchell on 3AW, Prime Minister Turnbull outlined the priorities of the newly elected federal government. Again I will quote from the transcript of the interview with Neil Mitchell on 3AW on 19 August 2016, in which the Prime Minister said —

We obviously have to hold a plebiscite on same-sex marriage.

It is undoubtedly apparent from those comments that the Turnbull coalition remains wholeheartedly committed to fulfilling its undertaking for a marriage plebiscite. It is also clear that the fulfilment of that undertaking is dependent on legislation being passed by the federal parliament.

That brings me to the fourth limb of today's motion. The first three limbs of today's motion are simply statements of fact; the fourth limb is a call for action arising from those facts, and is specifically stated in the motion, which calls on the Parliament of the commonwealth of Australia to facilitate the fulfilment of the undertaking by giving to the people of this state a say on the definition of marriage and approve a plebiscite. Members of Parliament understand the significance of keeping promises. We understand what it costs personally, professionally and politically to make them. We understand how essential it is to keep them.

The marriage debate has been well publicised. Indeed, it has probably attracted more publicity than any other debate. It is an issue that every single Australian has an opinion on. It is clear to those of us who have followed this debate closely over the years that those who wish the definition of marriage to be expanded are not content with any decision other than one that redefines marriage. Although I am not a user of Twitter, a tweet from James MacPherson on Tuesday this week drew my attention, as it concisely sums up the state of affairs in this debate. It states, according to my notes —

No less than 14 SSM bills have been presented to Parliament, all voted down. Now they want another shot. It's called legislation by fatigue.

This is one of the reasons I support the Turnbull coalition fulfilling its undertaking to the people of Australia. Above all else, we were promised a say on this matter; now we are entitled to have our say.

As I conclude I encourage honourable members to join me in acknowledging the undertaking of the Turnbull coalition government that if re-elected it would instigate a plebiscite on the definition of marriage. Furthermore, I encourage honourable members to leave their allegiances to their political parties at the door of this chamber and to graciously note that Western Australians overwhelmingly voted for the Turnbull coalition at the 2016 federal election. I take this opportunity to commend the coalition for its public statements since its re-election, which is recommitted to fulfilling its undertaking. As a result, I call on the members of our federal Parliament to recognise these facts and facilitate the fulfilment of the undertaking by giving to the people of Western Australia a say on the definition of marriage. Specifically, I call on them to approve a plebiscite.

I seek leave to table the five documents that I have referred to this morning, specifically for the benefit of *Hansard*, it is the *Hansard* of the House of Representatives questions without notice, 15 September 2015; the transcript of the online leaders' debate in Sydney on 17 June 2016; the statistics of the Australian Electoral Commission on the 2016 federal election; the transcript of the 7.30 interview on 18 July 2016; and, the transcript of the interview on 3AW radio on 19 August 2016.

Leave granted. [See paper 4435.]

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral) [11.47 am]: It will not surprise anyone that the Labor Party does not support the motion. However, I am pleased to put on record that I support the Premier and his view that the proposed plebiscite for marriage equality be scrapped and that the federal Parliament deal with this issue. Although members on this side have said that they support the Premier, not one Liberal Party member of Parliament has stood to say that they support the Premier. That shows that things are afoot. Marriage equality featured as an issue in the federal election, but it is utter nonsense to suggest that it was the sole or major reason for the Liberal Party's primary vote in this state in the federal election. The matter was dealt with a few times during the federal election, but it was not one of the main issues. Many other issues were front and centre of the campaign.

As Hon Sally Talbot reminded us in an earlier debate, a conservative government legislated to explicitly ban lesbian and gay marriage in 2004 when it amended the Marriage Act 1961. There is no need for a referendum or plebiscite to reverse that change. It was the Howard Government that in 2004 brought forward legislation to ban same-sex marriage. This was the same John Howard who had refused to provide a message of support to the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras festival booklet around the same time. It was also the same man who in an interview on *A Current Affair* said that he would be disappointed if one of his children told him they were gay or lesbian. Thankfully, the world has moved on and we now have a Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition who are both in favour of marriage equality, although their views differ on the road we should take to get there. In fact, John Howard is now on the record this year saying that he, too, would prefer this issue be dealt with by a parliamentary vote because he is a believer in representative democracy. I have already said today that I support the Premier, and now I am saying that I support the former conservative Prime Minister's view on this matter. This issue could be dealt with on a nonpartisan basis and it should be an issue on which members get a free vote. I hope that members of the federal Parliament would be cognisant of the public's calls on this issue. At the moment, around 65 per cent of the Australian public support marriage equality.

Earlier, a member spoke about her children and how she would like them to have a vote in a plebiscite. I know of young people who, during the recent federal campaign, voted on a particular party's view on the issue of same-sex marriage. I know of young people who contacted candidates and asked them directly during the campaign about their views on same-sex marriage and whether that candidate would vote on this issue in the federal Parliament. Other members have alluded to this plebiscite not being needed, and that it will stir up hatred. I was not in this chamber in 2001 when gay and lesbian law reform was introduced, but I was a follower of politics at that stage and I know how nasty it got and that some of the comments made both in this place and the other chamber and out in the general community were vile. Some of those comments were disgraceful. That is what we will see again if there is a plebiscite later this year or early next year. People will say what they want. There is no discrimination act that stops people from saying vile things against lesbian and gay people. The gay and lesbian population across this country already has a higher suicide rate than the community generally. My fear is that some of the vile comments that will be made will impact on young people and may lead to young people either attempting suicide or dying by suicide.

We do not need a plebiscite. I know that members on this side alluded to the referendum that took place in Ireland last year. I am very proud of the decision that the Irish electorate made. I was very proud to see, particularly young Irish people, in the days leading up to the referendum, sharing their stories on Twitter and Facebook about making their way back to Ireland, whether from Europe, America or Australia, to ensure that Ireland voted the right way on this important issue. Ireland had a vote on this issue because it needed to. Its constitution required a referendum to take place. As I have said previously, we have no such requirement in this country. The federal Parliament voted to explicitly ban same-sex marriage for lesbian and gay people, and it is my view that the federal Parliament could vote now to overturn that ban and to allow same-sex couples the opportunity to get married.

It is no surprise to anybody in this place that I have a conflict of interest, to a degree. I took the short-lived opportunity in the Australian Capital Territory a few years ago to marry my partner. Obviously, the High Court overruled that decision and it quite rightly pointed out that it was only the federal Parliament that could legislate in this area. I took advantage of the law in Ireland to have a civil partnership ceremony with my partner. I have to say that it pains me greatly that although my relationship is recognised in law in Ireland and many countries around the world that it is not recognised in this country in this day and age. The reality is that people in this country are getting married already. British citizens need only go to their consulate or high commission for this, or if an Australian is marrying a British citizen, they can marry and it will be recognised by the laws of Britain. It is a great shame that in this day and age members of federal Parliament, who are elected by the people of Australia and who have the power to overturn or change laws and to legislate in this area, do not do it.

I do not want others to go through the pain and torture that young people have gone through previously when they were bullied or harassed because of their sexuality. That will happen again, but it does not need to happen again. We do not need to spend \$160 million or more, as Hon Samantha Rowe mentioned in her contribution

Hon Nick Goiran; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Peter Katsambanis

earlier today. Money is tight, and not only the state budget, but also the national budget is in a serious condition. Why would the federal government spend upwards of \$160 million on a giant opinion poll when nobody has to take account of the results? In fact, members of Parliament such as Senator Bob Day, the Family First senator in South Australia, have said that people like him—conservative Christians who do not support this social reform—will not stop campaigning against the issue just because a plebiscite votes one way or the other; they will continue to argue against this reform.

Some people are pushing for a referendum, but we do not need a referendum in this state or this country, because this issue could be legislated for in the federal Parliament. I am proud to say that federal Labor went to the election with a policy that said that within its first 100 days in office it would legislate in this area. We did that because we believe that lesbian and gay people deserve the same rights as everybody else.

Other members referred to the churches. Churches will not be forced to marry people if it is against their wishes or beliefs. That is not what the change in the law will do. This law will allow same-sex couples the same opportunity as other couples. It will change the nature and face of this country. It will bring us out of our deep, dark past and into the modern era. I do not support this motion. I do not think a plebiscite is needed and I do not think we should waste the money. I want this place to oppose the plebiscite, and I certainly think that the Premier is right on this issue: it is not needed; it is wasteful and it will not do us any good at all.

HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan) [11.58 am]: It is important that I remind myself, and perhaps other members, that this is a motion about whether to have a plebiscite. It is not about whether we do or do not agree with the current definition of marriage. My comments will not be around the definition of marriage at all.

I was really interested when members were saying that we did not need a referendum or a plebiscite, so I looked up the definition of those words. A plebiscite is a direct vote for all members of an electorate. I found out something that is new to me, which is that a plebiscite was a law enacted by the plebeian assembly in Roman days, and that is where the word “pleb” comes from. In Latin, the word pleb means common people. Sometimes we use that in almost a negative term. Somebody might say, “Oh, you’re sitting with the plebs”, in a derogative manner. In fact, the idea of giving the common people a say on a particular issue has been around since the sixteenth century. So that is where the word “plebiscite” came from. Although people have used the words “referendum” and “plebiscite” interchangeably, it has been made fairly clear that this is not an issue that will affect the Constitution. Consequently, a referendum would not be necessary and is not desirable in any way, shape or form, but having the opportunity for the people to have a say on an important issue like this is something that would be effective. The government holds plebiscites not infrequently—just a few times—to test the community’s views or the people’s views on whether they support or do not support a particular form of action that may be considered. I was interested to realise that the plebiscites that were undertaken in 1916 and 1917 were around conscription. There was a 2007 plebiscite in Queensland on council changes there. In 1977 there was a plebiscite around the national song poll, and in 1997 another plebiscite was held around the election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention. It is not that difficult for us to run plebiscites across Australia.

I actually do support the motion that has been put by Hon Nick Goiran. I started thinking last night about how many times we have heard both sides of politics condemn governments for breaking promises. This is a promise that was made by the federal government going into the election. The federal government is now talking about continuing with that promise, yet members often spend inordinate amounts of time in this house talking about how bad governments are for breaking promises. Of course, members are being fairly selective about that in this debate. I think there are quite good reasons that governments sometimes need to break a promise—things like delays, planning reasons or population changes—but none of those things are impacting on this particular matter. This is a matter that has not been impacted by those things.

As with Hon Jacqui Boydell, this has been a frequent topic of conversation with young folk in my family—my grandchildren, my own sons and daughters and the young folk that they bring around me. Sometimes I cannot escape the discussion even if I want to. They absolutely find the time, like when I am driving to the farm and they are coming with me and I cannot get out. They actually want to sit there and talk about this issue nonstop for the whole hour and a half that it takes to get there. Their strongest point is not the debate about whether the definition of “marriage” is right or wrong, although that has been hotly discussed as well; their very, very strong point is to question why politicians should be allowed to make a law that affects everybody when individual politicians can have such judgemental positions on it and when they want it to be an opportunity to be for all people of Australia, them included, to have a say on it. They were incredibly happy when I was able to assure them that that was what the federal government has now agreed to—to hold a plebiscite—and that they would have an opportunity to make a comment about this and put their views forward, and that it was not going to be dictated to them by politicians. Although I am a politician myself, my kids do not have very high regard for the ability of politicians to properly represent such diverse views as come about with an issue such as this. They raised with me—and I agree with them—that there are some issues that are just too divisive to be fairly

represented by an individual person representing thousands and thousands of people's views. They also complain to me that my own personal views are very strong about the definition of marriage, and they do not necessarily want my views to overcloud their views. They also talked about the influence of religion, culture and the various beliefs that people have in clouding the views of politicians on this matter. Again, they reiterated over and over again: "Why can't the people have a say on this?" They were of course very happy when I was able to tell them that the people were going to have a say on this and that that would then inform the federal government on how it wanted to go about it.

The other reason I support this motion is that I am very conscious, having dealt with a lot of sensitive issues in my portfolios when I was a minister but also outside of that around such things as euthanasia, abortion and some of the other areas that we have had to deal with even in this chamber, that the minute those issues are raised, there is such a concerted effort by different groups to get their voices heard. It is the loudest or the most organised that people can get in terms of flooding us with emails or letter writing or whatever it is. This seems to be the way that people think they will win the argument—by overloading us with all that kind of information, when, to be honest, the simplest way to find out what the general public think about this is to have a plebiscite. We can have some organised debates if that is what people want, but let us hear what the sometimes silent majority wants to say on this particular matter.

The Premier's concern, which I wholly support, is that the plebiscite will come at the same time as a state election. I would much prefer that it happen at a time away from the state election so that the state election cannot be impacted by it. I do not know what the opportunities are for the federal government to either bring it as far forward as possible or leave it until after the election, but my preference would be for it to not impact on the state election. I can tell members that in the three election campaigns in which I have already participated—in 2005, 2008 and 2013—these issues were there; they were being discussed. Members are asked questions about their views on abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage and so on, so it will not completely eliminate this issue from the discussion that takes place in and around this election. However, if the plebiscite could be held off until after the 11 March election, I would be a lot happier about that.

The other comment I would make is that many people think that the media is reporting on these stories in an unbiased fashion and that it is not creating the stories or not trying to skewer debate on the stories in a particular way. Unfortunately, I cannot finish!

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [12.08 pm]: I rise to make a couple of comments on this motion. I thank Hon Nick Goiran for bringing the motion to the notice of the chamber. I actually agree with the motion as it stands, in that I think it is incumbent on the federal government to hold a plebiscite given that it was an election commitment. Having said that, in this instance—and this is a very rare occasion—I do not actually agree with Hon Nick Goiran in that I do not think we need a plebiscite. I say that for a host of reasons, but I will just stick with the commitment of the government first of all. As far as the government is concerned, it is incumbent on it, given the commitment it made to the Australian people, to hold a plebiscite. Whether or not we agree with that, the federal government did go to the election with an unambiguous commitment to hold a plebiscite on this issue. It could have done one of two things—have a plebiscite or a referendum. It cannot have a referendum because a referendum means it would change the Constitution. We do not need to change the Constitution, we just need to change the Marriage Act, so let us have some perspective on that. As we know, referenda are notoriously difficult to pass. This nation has had its Constitution for over 100 years now and in that time we have had, from memory from my politics teaching, 44 occasions when we have tried to change the Constitution, and only on eight occasions have those referenda been successful. That is because the bar is set very high. For a referendum to be successful, it must achieve an overall majority of votes—50 per cent plus one—and a majority of votes in a majority of the states, which is four out of the six. More often than not, the smaller states gang up on the largest states on the one occasion they can do so, and the four smaller states—Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia—vote against a particular issue. This issue raises a lot of emotional debate, and it would have been very interesting to see, if it required a change to the Constitution, whether it would have passed under those conditions. The plebiscite, of course, will only give the Parliament and the public an idea of what people think. That, quite frankly, is where the local member needs to come in and make a call.

I only bring this up because a couple of members opposite brought it up in relation to the Safe Schools issue. If we apply exactly the same criteria to the Safe Schools issue that we are using to argue against a plebiscite, we cannot use that same argument for the Safe Schools program. In Western Australia, we are leaving the Safe Schools program up to individual schools to make a determination of whether or not they want to introduce the Safe Schools program, just the same as the people who are saying that we do not need a plebiscite argue that it should be left up to individual members. However, in Victoria, the Safe Schools program is being imposed on schools. We cannot have it both ways. Even with the logic that has been provided by some members today, that

is a contradictory argument, and it really cannot exist. I raised that point because it was raised by a couple of members opposite; I would not have raised it otherwise.

Having said that, I think this will be a divisive issue. That is not the Gospel according to Peter; we do not need a PhD to work that one out. It will be an unnecessarily divisive issue, and I would like to think that we could have moved beyond that and given the jurisdiction of local members that authority. We did that just a couple of months ago. I would like to think that local members will represent their constituents, and that is why I personally do not think that a plebiscite is necessary, and I agree with the Premier on that one. Having said that, I endorse the motion put by Hon Nick Goiran, given the fact that the government committed to a plebiscite going into the election, and it is now incumbent upon the government to deliver upon that commitment.

HON LYNN MacLAREN (South Metropolitan) [12.13 pm]: I often find myself on the opposite side of an argument with Hon Nick Goiran, and this is no exception. It is fair to say that the motion before us basically just acknowledges what is out there in the public domain. Certain people have said certain things, and I have no problem with acknowledging that truth. However, the motion just ignores all the evidence that we have so far in the community that the whole reason that the plebiscite was introduced was not to inform parliamentarians about how the public feels about marriage equality, because plenty of polls have already shown that more than a majority of Australians support marriage equality, even Christians. Some people who claim to be Christians have been saying the worst things about marriage equality, but even amongst the Christian community, the majority supports reform in this area.

The party room meeting decided that, instead of voting for marriage equality, which was yet again on the federal agenda—to avoid putting their money where their mouth is, if you will—a plebiscite would be held. The party room thought that was a great idea because it was a good reason to avoid passing marriage equality legislation. It was not a reason to engage the Australian population and follow its advice if it approved the plebiscite; it was to put a roadblock in the way of the reforms that have been building momentum since the 2004 change to the Marriage Act. The purpose of the plebiscite is not to inform representatives; it is to block marriage equality. We know that, because we now have the stories of how it came about, and who was debating whom in that party room. Brian Greig, a former senator, at a meeting of an organisation set up to campaign for a yes vote if the plebiscite is held, said that he had heard from people in that room, and he knew what happened. It was decided to put in a roadblock.

A plebiscite is not a step forward; it is not even a genuine consultation. It is another roadblock to marriage equality. That is its purpose, and it will have a divisive impact on the community. The Greens have said in the federal Parliament that they are now concerned—it has been brought up by my colleagues on the other side of the chamber—that it may well be that this plebiscite is delayed beyond February. The promise from the Prime Minister was to hold a plebiscite before the end of this year, but now it is to be held in February. There is no guarantee that it will be held in February. That is our concern, because people who were standing in the state election were worried about that. However, delays are the entire point of this plan, so we would not be surprised if this plebiscite was pushed out beyond February. For all the people who have been campaigning on this issue since 2004, that is ridiculous.

I want to put this on the parliamentary record because the reasons that the plebiscite is considered to be potentially divisive came up in the previous debate. This information has come out since the Turnbull government promised to hold a plebiscite, and this is what we need to take into account, because history does not stop; it keeps moving. As representatives, we need to listen to the public discourse. In that public discourse, we have heard this from Rodney Croome. I quote a short comment he made in the public debate on one of the reasons he is now campaigning earnestly to stop the plebiscite —

In the mid 1990s, at the height of the bitter and divisive debate about decriminalising homosexuality in Tasmania, a young gay man, Nick Donovan, found himself in a quandary.

Nick had bought a one-way ticket to Melbourne because he could no longer bear the anti-gay hate. But neither could he leave his family, his friends and the place that gave his life meaning.

The night before he was due to leave he took his own life.

We know what he was thinking because he wrote about it in his suicide note.

At the time, I was busy trying to move decriminalisation forward by making submissions to the United Nations, lobbying state MPs, advocating in the media and speaking to community groups. There is a part of me that will always fear I was too distracted by all this lobbying and advocacy, and that I didn't do enough to protect vulnerable people such as Nick.

He is a splinter in my bloodstream that has finally reached my heart.

If there is a plebiscite, and when the first gay kid dies at his own hand because of the hate and fear-mongering, I have to be able to look at myself in the mirror and know I did everything I could to stop it ... everything.

Sadly, that includes giving up my role at Australian Marriage Equality.

Members should not forget that this is not just about couples who are in love and want to be married; this is about children who are growing up and trying to make sense of their lives. They are vulnerable at this time and we do not want to expose them to this hate mongering.

HON PETER KATSAMBANIS (North Metropolitan) [12.20 pm]: I thank Hon Nick Goiran for bringing this motion to the house. On the face of it, this motion is relatively simple and states a series of truths, as the Leader of the House pointed out: the Turnbull Liberal–National coalition government campaigned on a particular issue at the last election; Western Australians overwhelmingly voted in favour of the Turnbull Liberal–National coalition government at the recent federal election; the government has then gone on to recommit to its commitment; and, now we call on it to go ahead and do it. It is pretty simple. In bringing the motion to this chamber, Hon Nick Goiran has exposed two really big divides in Australian life today, and none of those divides has anything to do with the issue of same-sex marriage. The first and important divide is the growing gulf between elected members of Parliament and the people they are elected to represent. If members do not believe that that gulf exists and that it is growing, they should just follow the pattern of state and federal elections for the last 30 to 40 years during which time the vote for the two major political parties has continued to decline. Not a lot of work has been done around the qualitative reasons behind people choosing third parties and, effectively, a less stable government by not allowing governments to have carte blanche in legislative agendas that they might want to set out. When we scratch the surface, we find that it is because the public does not believe that we as a political class always put its best interests at heart. One prime example of that is the penchant of politicians for changing their mind, walking away and perhaps flip-flopping or—how did my friend Senator Mathias Cormann put it the other day?—wibble-wobbling like jelly on their commitments. They are funny words but they are true and encapsulate some of the reasoning behind people moving away from stable government, choosing the mad extremes of the political spectrum and looking for someone who perhaps may represent their interests. They are flawed when they go to those mad extremes, but that is the judgement of the people. They do not believe that we, as a class, are doing what we say we are going to do.

The debate on the motion started in the chamber today has exposed another issue: the growing totalitarianism on one side of the political divide when it comes to public opinion. I refer to the right to hold and express an opinion and for those who have a contrary view to say, “I respect what you say, but, respectfully, I have a different view.” Increasingly, the right that we know by the terms “freedom of speech” or “freedom of expression”—political freedom, generally—is being shut down. Sadly, it seems to be mostly shut down by one side of the political divide—those people on the left. They love to label or smear any opinion that they do not like. Even before we have had a plebiscite or any debate on a plebiscite, opponents of enshrining same-sex marriage in the law are labelled as hate mongers for spreading fear. The opinion is delegitimised even before it is expressed. That is a very quick march down the slippery slope away from democracy and towards totalitarianism. We are told what to think and those who hold a contrary view are punished for that view. That again feeds into that first divide that I spoke about when the elites, sections of the political class, and people who hold a perhaps fashionable view or even a majority view, shut down debate and tell people who might have a contrary view that not only are they not allowed to express their view, but also their view is not legitimate, and on some occasions their view is criminalised. I will not get into that whole notion of what section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 does to people who legitimately hold the view or express that view, but they are being cowered into submission by this growing totalitarianism. They are the sorts of things exposed by the motion that Hon Nick Goiran has brought to the table. It is quite startling and interesting to note those people on the side of totalitarianism and shutting down free speech, as opposed to those people who are happy for that free speech to go ahead.

I note with interest the comments of Hon Lynn MacLaren about possible delays with the proposed plebiscite. I note one of the major roadblocks to any plebiscite being held seems to be the opinions that the Australian Labor Party, the Greens and perhaps various third-party senators hold, because no plebiscite can be held unless both houses of federal Parliament agree to hold it. If members want to talk about roadblocks and delays, what are the Australian Greens political party, the Australian Labor Party and some of the Independents doing to stop those delays and to break down the roadblocks to have the plebiscite that the Australian people were promised at the last election? They are doing nothing. They are the ones putting up the roadblocks. So when members talk about delays, they should look in the mirror sometimes and see who is actually delaying the process. Do not take my word for it; go to today’s *The Australian Financial Review*. An article on page 5 by Phil Coorey states that the chairman of Australian Marriage Equality has warned those people on the side that

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supports same-sex marriage being enshrined in federal law to not turn it into a political football and get on with it. They should suck up the fact that there will be a plebiscite and get on with it. That chairman is Alex Greenwich, a New South Wales Independent member of Parliament. He is from that Green left side of the Independents in trendy inner-city Sydney. When the chairman of Australian Marriage Equality is warning supporters of same-sex marriage to not muck it up, they should listen. Again in this chamber today we have heard claims that a vast majority of the Australian public—60 to 65 per cent—support same-sex marriage. What is the fear? Do not tell me it is a fear that the opponents of same-sex marriage are somehow or other hate mongers who vilify people, because that does not wash; that is an attempt to shut down legitimate debate. Is it a fear that perhaps those figures are not correct? Is it a fear that perhaps those figures might be exposed? I do not know. Is it simply another tricky attempt by politicians to convince the Australian people once again that politicians do not stand up for their best interests and that politician cannot be trusted? If that is the case, I think they are doing a good job of it, and they should not be. That is why I thank Hon Nick Goiran for bringing this motion to the house today. I support the motion that he has put before us.

HON NICK GOIRAN (South Metropolitan) [12.30 pm] — in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate on this motion this afternoon, as it is now. I particularly acknowledge the remarks of Hon Stephen Dawson, Hon Helen Morton, Hon Peter Collier, Hon Lynn MacLaren and Hon Peter Katsambanis. At the outset, I thank Hon Helen Morton, Hon Peter Collier and Hon Peter Katsambanis for their support for the motion.

I want to make a few comments about some of the comments made by Hon Stephen Dawson. He indicated that it would be no surprise that he would not be supporting the motion. Indeed, it was no surprise to me. However, that demonstrates what I call the Julia Gillard approach to elections. Members opposite may well recall that individual saying that there would be no carbon tax under any government that she led. Of course, immediately after the election, we saw the exact opposite. Members opposite will certainly recall the fury of the Australian people about the complete dysfunction of that particular Labor-Green coalition government. One of the things that incensed the Australian people, and particularly the Western Australian people—so much so that we had a record vote for the Liberal–National Party in Western Australia—was the fact that something could be said so categorically by that government and it then did the exact opposite.

Today, members opposite are countenancing exactly that same behaviour. Without exception, the comments of members opposite this morning are countenancing that the federal government should ignore the pledge that it gave to the Australian people before the election, and, in that way, to the Western Australian people, and do the exact opposite. The people of Western Australia should be incredibly concerned about the alternative government in Western Australia. These individuals are saying, in effect, “Don’t worry about the words you say leading up to an election; they are meaningless. After the election, we’ll do whatever we like”. I recall that that was in effect what was reported about Mr Peter Garrett at the time, who basically said, “We’ll do whatever we like after the election, anyway.” That is something that I will never support.

The purpose of today’s motion is to make it abundantly clear that we in Western Australia expect the federal coalition government to deliver on its undertaking. That undertaking is not something that can simply be disposed of at will. Therefore, on that point, I very much take a contrary view to Hon Stephen Dawson. I add that contrary to the fear expressed by some members today that there would be some kind of vile hate speech, I challenge those members to identify any such thing in today’s debate. There certainly has not been any such thing today, and that is the standard of debate that I would expect moving forward.

Hon Stephen Dawson: You are correct—there has not been any today, and I am pleased about that. But people and ministers are on the record as being nasty.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What we have had is an incredible display—as per usual—of verballing by members opposite. They have taken it upon themselves today to verbal the Premier —

Hon Stephen Dawson: No. Just read the *Hansard* from 2001.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: They have taken the opportunity to verbal the member for Southern River, and, indeed, some members opposite have taken it upon themselves to verbal the High Court. That is quite extraordinary. Those members have decided —

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I note the mirth that is expressed by the Leader of the Opposition. Obviously, she is one of those members who have failed to read the decision of the Commonwealth of Australia v the Australian Capital Territory [2013] HCA 55. I encourage the Leader of the Opposition and her colleagues to read that decision. It is very easy to find. If members are struggling to find it, they only need to come and see me and I will give them a copy.

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Hon Lynn MacLaren interjected

Hon NICK GOIRAN: They will then be in a position to be educated on what the High Court actually said, Hon Lynn MacLaren, not what we want the High Court to have said.

Hon Lynn MacLaren: We have debated that at length, member. I think we have debated that previously, and you lost.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What an extraordinary contribution by Hon Lynn MacLaren. In those few words, she is clearly demonstrating that she has absolutely no idea of what I have just been speaking about. What I said is that the honourable member, and others, have been verballing the High Court this morning. We have never had that debate in this chamber, so the member has just manufactured that for the purpose of an interjection.

I thank members for their support for this motion. I look forward to the Turnbull coalition government fulfilling its undertaking, and hope that will happen in the very near future.

Debate lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.