



Nationals say OK to gays

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THE WA Nationals have thrown their support behind civil unions for gays and lesbians.

In an unprecedented move, the party voted to support legally recognised unions of same-sex couples at its state conference yesterday.

And **Nationals' leader Brendon Grylls confirmed** that the party would take the policy _ which will shock some conservative supporters _ to the next state election.

"It's now part of our policy," he said.

"There is a perception that the National Party is a party of farmers and this couldn't be further from the truth.

"This a step along the journey to transform that perception."

Young Nationals WA president Darren Moir and executive member Michael Rose, who put the motion, called the vote a victory for equality.

"I was nervous. It's not easy speaking on something like this to an audience where the majority of people are in their 60s," Mr Rose said.

The British Government this year introduced the Civil Partnership Act, allowing same-sex couples to marry. But in Australia, the Federal Government has opposed same-sex marriage and quashed ACT legislation allowing homosexuals to make civil unions.

The Nationals' move is seen as a big victory for gay and lesbian groups.

Mr Rose, who is not gay, said he moved the motion after discussions with some of his friends who were gay.

Mr Moir, who is also not gay, said the vote was a sign the Nationals were in touch with society.

An 84-year-old stalwart had been in favour of the motion.

"She said that homosexuality was natural and people were born with it and we should get over it," Mr Moir said.

"It's signals a new era and a step forward to get rid of old prejudices and move forward.

“It was a brave thing to bring this to the conference. We are not radicals _ it was the right thing to do.”

Gay and Lesbian Equality WA congratulated the party on passing the motion.

GALE Convenor Rod Swift said the motion showed the debate about granting equality to same-sex couples had matured.

“This move by the National Party shows there is an increasing level of support within the party to secure fairness and certainty for same-sex couples and their families, especially those in rural and regional WA,” Mr Swift said.

“We welcome the Nationals' mature debate on civil unions and their continued support for laws which support and protect a diverse range of families and relationships.”

But Mr Swift said there was need for further reforms to protect non-marital relationships.

Married couples could rely on their marriage certificate when asked by a business or government department to prove their relationship, but de facto couples did not have this ability, he said.

The introduction of a registration and certificate scheme in WA would help tens of thousands of de facto couples, both gay and straight.

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