

COMSUPER ACTION COMMITTEE

12th. December 2007.

The Hon. Dr. Brendan Nelson, MP.
Leader of the Opposition,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA. 2600.

RE: COMSUPER DEATH BENEFITS : SAME SEX COUPLES.

Congratulations and thanks to you and your Deputy Leader, Julie Bishop, for moving the debate on recognizing same sex couples for social and financial entitlements so far forward since assuming the leadership of the Coalition. Having just re-read your very moving column: "Compassion the key in the gay debate" (North Shore Times 1/3/00), which your office recently made available as a pointer to your current thinking, I was not surprised by the position you have taken.

The Comsuper Action Committee would be grateful if the Shadow Cabinet would confirm that it will honour the election commitment made by Malcolm Turnbull, and confirmed by Senator Minchin, and support legislation to extend to same-sex couples the eligibility for death benefits in all Commonwealth defined-benefit superannuation schemes.

Along with former Wing Commander, Neil Murray, I met with our local member, Malcolm Turnbull on September 21st. to discuss the Coalition Government's position on this issue. Malcolm Turnbull advised us that, in its response to the HREOC REPORT (discussed at the August 21st. Cabinet meeting), the Government had changed its position and moved away from the "interdependent relationship model" for delivering same-sex entitlements, in favour of giving same-sex couples equal status with heterosexual de facto couples, as recommended in the HREOC Report. Malcolm explained that the reasons for this change were that it was impossible to calculate the additional number of interdependent relationships, other than same sex couples, and therefore calculate the costs. This was already evident at the May 2007 Senate Estimates hearings when Senator Minchin revealed that the estimate for the additional unfunded liability for the reform was \$2 billion, split 50/50 between same sex couples and other interdependent relationships.

We infer from this that, although it reverted to the "interdependent relationship" model in its election promise - possibly so as not to upset the Australian Christian Lobby - the Coalition has no objection in principle to giving same-sex couples equal financial and social status with heterosexual de facto couples, and therefore can have no objection on these grounds for not supporting legislation to recognise same-sex couples for superannuation death benefits.

We look forward to the Coalition adopting a bi-partisan approach to the speedy implementation of the HREOC Reforms.

Yours truly,
John Challis,

Convener, Comsuper Action Committee.

Copies: Julie Bishop, Malcolm Turnbull, Senator Minchin, Peter Dutton.