

POLITICS (/NEWS/POLITICAL)

Parliament passes same-sex marriage bill

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New Zealand has become the 13th country in the world to enshrine marriage equality in law.

A bill legalising same-sex marriage passed its third and final reading in Parliament by 77 votes to 44, overlooked by a packed public gallery on Wednesday night.

It amends the Marriage Act so that two people - regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity - can marry.



Labour's Louisa Wall (at podium) with supporting MPs after the vote on Wednesday. Photo: RNZ

3rd The sponsor of the Marriage Amendment Bill, Labour Party MP Louisa Wall, was the first to speak on the bill.

"My observation in my time in the House has been that there are few occasions when the public gallery is full to overflowing. This bill has seen a full gallery at the first and second readings, and again tonight.

"My only other experience of that has been Treaty settlement legislation recording the agreement reached between Maori and the Crown.

"In both instances, the parties affected are a minority group who've been marginalised. They've been dealt with unjustly under the law and steps are being taken to right the wrongs they've suffered.

"And it shows me that this process matters. **Having Parliament recognise and address injustices and unfairness matters to those affected by it. It's the start of the healing process.**

"This third reading is our road towards healing and including all citizens in our state institution of marriage - regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.

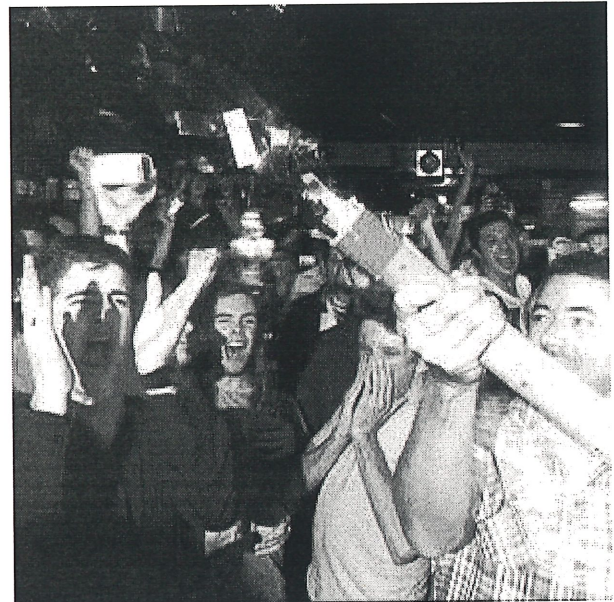
"While our focus has been on Aotearoa, it's important to remember we are one country that's part of a global community discussing marriage equality. Twelve countries have already been through this process.

"Excluding a group in society from marriage is oppressive and unacceptable. There's no justification for the prohibitions of the past, based on religion, race or gender. Today we're embarrassed and appalled by these examples, and in every instance it was actioned by the state.

"This is not about church teachings or philosophy - it never has been. It's about the state excluding people from the institution of marriage because of their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity."

Louisa Wall's speech was greeted with a standing ovation.

National Party MP Maurice Williamson, who cast his conscience vote in support of the bill, told MPs it is about recognising love between two people.



Supporters of the bill celebrate at a bar in central Auckland. Photo: RNZ

"That is all we are doing. We are not declaring nuclear war on a foreign state, we are not bringing in a virus that could wipe out our agriculture sector forever.

"We are allowing two people who love each other to have that recognised, and I can't see what's wrong with that for love nor money."

New Zealand First leader Winston Peters, who voted against same-sex marriage, continued his call for a referendum on the issue.

"We've spent the better year debating Ms Wall's bill, and sadly the public are not much the wiser for it. In fact, there's hardly been a debate."

Before the debate, Deputy Prime Minister Bill English said the law change was harmless, but he wouldn't be supporting the bill, as he did not think it was the benchmark for equality.

"It does seem a bit odd that an institution that is becoming much less used and much less popular has now become the benchmark for equal treatment of people.

"People can have equal treatment (if) they get registered by the state with their relationship; we've got plenty of room for a range of arrangements."

Earlier on Wednesday, Louisa Wall said she had found some of the opposition to marriage equality hard to stomach. All MPs have received emails about the legislation, some abusive and threatening. She said some emails have affected her, but it was part of being an MP and the democratic process.

The bill will be in force by the end of August, four months after it receives Royal Assent.

