

Greens NSW Media release - 1 July 2009

**Campaign call: end discrimination spin-off against same-sex couples**

On the day of the July 1 start to the federal governments social security reforms, Greens MP Lee Rhiannon has called on the government not to force same-sex couples to expose their relationship after years of community alienation.

"The federal government's failure to protect same-sex couples who will be financially disadvantaged by the social security changes will undermine the many benefits from the national reform program", Ms Rhiannon said.

"The Rudd government should show compassion to the same-sex couples who have lived for decades with discrimination and understandably do not want to publicly disclose their living arrangements.

"As with other changes to the Government pension, this one should be 'grandfathered' so that people already on a pension do not suddenly lose a large part of their income. Couples who are finally recognised as such by Centrelink after a lifetime of exclusion, should be maintain their current income until death.

"The Greens' plan to make this a community based campaign so Labor and Liberal MPs in the federal parliament come to their senses and do not turn their backs on same-sex people disadvantaged by the new law.

"The couples who now have to cope with the unintentional negative consequences of the social security reforms are gay and lesbian people who over many decades have had to adjust their lives because of society wide discrimination.

"Now that the Australian law has caught up with community standards the government needs to ensure that vulnerable groups of elderly same-sex couples do not suffer.

"My federal colleague Senator Sarah Hanson-Young has called for the federal government not to penalise same sex couples on social security benefits. In the senate Senator Hanson-Young moved that at a minimum there should be a 12-month transitional period to ensure individuals impacted by the changes have sufficient time to readjust their finances. Labor and the Coalition parties joined forces to defeat the Greens amendment. "

"We cannot allow the government to turn their back on this issue and allow same-sex couples to suffer because they are not willing to be flexible in the application of the law.

"The government has protected people disadvantaged by previous social security reforms. Now they should take similar action for same-sex couples who from today will be hit with another level of discrimination", Ms Rhiannon said.

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