



MEDIA RELEASE
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Abortion address this week at Parliament

On 13 October 2010, a young Cairns couple was acquitted of charges for illegally seeking an abortion. One year on, there has still been no change to abortion laws in Queensland.

Queensland women and their doctors still risk prosecution under the Criminal Code of 1899 if they seek or perform an abortion. They can face criminal charges and up to 7 years in prison for this 'offence'.

To reinvigorate the abortion law reform debate, Dr Leslie Cannold, award winning columnist and 2011 Australian Humanist of the Year, will present **The Courage to Make History: Transforming the Law on Abortion in Australia** at Parliamentary Annexe this Thursday.

Dr Cannold's address will be introduced by Professor Nicholas Fisk, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Queensland, and an obstetrician/gynaecologist and former President of the International Fetal Medicine & Surgery Society.

Professor Fisk explains "Queensland's 19th century termination laws were introduced to prevent harm to women from unsafe backyard abortion, and thus have little resonance with modern society and medical practice. Under these laws, abortion is only legal in exceptional circumstances to preserve the mother's life, and these do not include fetal abnormalities, socio-economic deprivation or pregnancies resulting from incest or rape". Professor Fisk continues "our uncertain and outmoded laws are a serious problem for women and the doctors who care for them, and a major impediment to the delivery of high quality care to individual women."

Queensland President of the Public Health Association of Australia, Dr Sara Gollschewski, adds "Surveys indicate that the people of Queensland, including doctors, believe that the law should be changed so that abortion is no longer a crime."¹

Access to abortion is in fact supported by a wide sector of the Australian population, across gender, religion, voting preferences and by general practitioners. Medical Director of Family Planning Queensland, Dr Caroline Harvey asserts, "GPs lack confidence and clarity in Queensland abortion laws. To protect women and the doctors who care for them, we must remove surgical and medication abortion from the Queensland criminal code."

For further information or comment, please contact Janelle Weissman, Director of Communications & Development on 07 3250 0222 or 0423 408 830.

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Sexual and reproductive health for all.

¹ de Costa CM, Russell DB, Carrette M. (2010) Views and practices of induced abortion among Australian Fellows and specialist trainees of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, *Medical Journal of Australia*, 193(1):13-6. AND

de Crespigny LJ, Wilkinson DJ, Douglas T, Textor M, Savulescu J. (2010) Australian attitudes to early and late abortion, *Medical Journal of Australia*, 193(1):9-12.
