

Same-sex unions get Labor nod

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GAYS and lesbians will win the right to marry and be recognised as a legal couple if new laws proposed by Labor are adopted by the State Government.

But the issue has caused some Labor state conference delegates to divorce themselves from the party, describing same-sex marriage as "wrong".

Gay rights advocates have welcomed the decision.

Australian Young Labor Tasmanian president Stuart Benson moved a motion at yesterday's conference calling on the State Government to reform the Marriage Act to allow same-sex couples the right to marry.

"The conference believes that all couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life should have their rela-

tionships treated equally and without discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation," Mr Benson said.

"The conference believes in equal access to marriage under Australian law, regardless of the sex of the parties."

Labor's existing policy supports state-based relationship registers for gay and lesbian couples but Mr Benson says the registers are inconsistent and do not support equality.

With an estimated 446 same-sex relationships in Tasmania, Labor senator Helen Polley said she believed the matter was not of community interest.

"When I have been out there campaigning I am constantly told this is no more a major issue in the community today than it was 10 years ago," Mrs Polley said.

Burnie branch delegate Annette Jordan urged

those "stuck in their ways" to wake up to modern changes in society.

But Lilydale delegate Barry Robinson said the union of two people of the same sex was "just wrong".

"A relationship is between a man and woman, two people of the opposite sex, that is the way it has always been . . . to call a marriage between two people of the same sex a marriage is just wrong," Mr Robinson said.

Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group spokesman Rodney Croome said the decision would put pressure on the delegates at the national Labor conference to follow suit.

"The decision will help dispel the unfair stereotype of Tasmania as socially backward," Mr Croome said.

In a close vote the motion was carried.