

Friday, 1 June 2007

DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIPS ENSHRINED IN LAW FROM TODAY

The State Government's new domestic partner laws come into force today – potentially affecting up to 100,000 South Australians.

The *Statutes Amendment (Domestic Partners) Act 2006*, passed by Parliament in December last year, gives **new rights and duties to both opposite-sex and same-sex *de facto* partners** and to other partners who may not be in a sexual relationship but live together on a genuine domestic basis as a couple.

Attorney-General Michael Atkinson says that although the new laws end discrimination for a number of South Australians, they also bring new responsibilities.

“That’s why, for the past two months, we have run an information campaign, with many South Australians taking the opportunity to inquire about how the changes affect them and their relationship.

According to the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics Census in 2001, 1062 men and 1237 women recorded themselves as living together in a same-sex relationship. In addition 77,336 people were living in opposite sex *de facto* relationships.

“Those figures are now six years old, so it would be a fair to predict that there are something like 100-thousand people in either a same-sex or opposite-sex *de facto* relationship,” Mr Atkinson says.

“What we don’t know is how many people are also affected by the law because they are living together on a genuine domestic basis, but not necessarily in a sexual relationship.”

THE NEW LAW AFFECTS:

- People who live in an opposite-sex *de facto* relationship;
- Those who live in a same-sex *de facto* relationship;
- Those who live together as close companions or life partners

THE NEW LAW DOES NOT COVER:

- Flatmates;
- Boarding or commercial relationships.

“What couples must also keep in mind is that the new laws mean that from today legal rights and duties automatically arise if the partners have been living together in this way for three years or more.

“It applies to couples existing in a relationship as of today as well as people who start living together in the future. That means that the time already lived together before today counts towards the three years.

“What everyone must remember is that, under the new laws, non-married couples will not have to do anything to get legal recognition of their relationship.”

The Legal Services Commission will be continuing to provide telephone advice to people on **1-300 366 424**. The Justice Department website also has a detailed explanation of the Act and its implications. That can be accessed at www.justice.sa.gov.au.