

AUSTRALIA

The Upper House of the state of New South Wales passed the Property Relationships Legislation Amendment Bill May 26, granting same-sex couples the same property, inheritance, alimony and medical-decision rights as heterosexual de facto couples.

The vote was 36-3. As a government bill, the measure is guaranteed approval by the lower house, the Legislative Assembly.

"New South Wales is now at the forefront in same-sex laws in Australia by a long way," says Alan Kirkland, co-convenor of the New South Wales Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby.

Australia's largest city, Melbourne, is in New South Wales.

The law also covers nonsexual couples, such as an adult child caring for an aging parent.

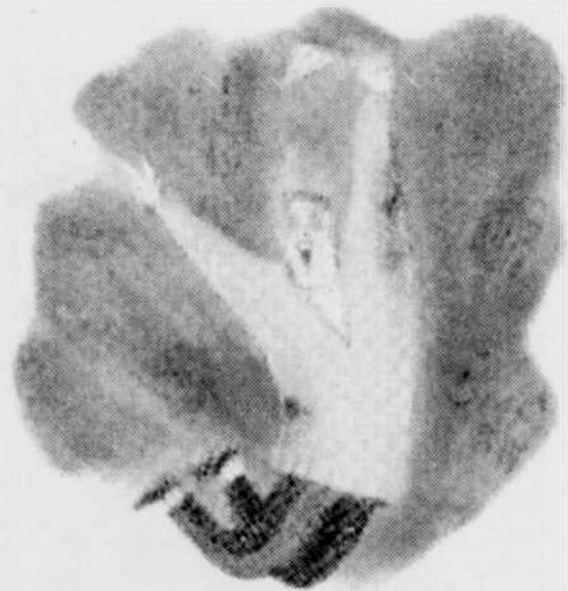
Other areas covered by the measure include property transfer taxes, insurance contracts, trustee property, wills, protected estates, judges' pensions, and family provision. The bill also recognizes same-sex couples for purposes of organ donation, coroner inquests, decisions about bail for arrested persons, guardianship in regard to mental health, rights in retirement villages, and accident compensation.

CANADA

The Supreme Court ruled May 20 that Ontario's family law definition of *spouse* as a person of the opposite sex is unconstitutional.

The 8-1 ruling means hundreds of provincial and federal laws with similar wording will have to be changed—and gay equality will take a giant leap forward.

The case began in 1992 when a woman discovered she could not seek alimony from her former lesbian lover.



The Supreme Court ruling states: "The exclusion of same-sex partners from the benefits of...the [Family Law Act] promotes the view that...individuals in same-sex relationships generally, are less worthy of recognition and protection. It implies that they are judged to be incapable of forming intimate relationships of economic interdependence as compared to opposite-sex couples.... Such exclusion perpetuates the disadvantages suffered by individuals in same-sex relationships and contributes to the erasure of their existence."

Jan Cheney, spokeswoman for the lobby group Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere, says: "This decision is entirely consistent with a recent Angus Reid poll, which shows that more than two-thirds of Canadians support equal rights and responsibilities for those in same-sex relationships."

The Canadian Family Action Coalition denounced the ruling.

CHINA

A new health ministry regulation prohibits revealing the name or address of someone with HIV or AIDS, *China Daily* reported May 21.

New rules also will forbid doctors from refusing to treat people with HIV. Officials believe about 400,000 Chinese have contracted HIV.

DENMARK

Parliament voted 61-48 on May 20 to augment the rights of same-sex couples who get married under the nation's registered-partnership law.

Among the changes, registered same-sex couples from Norway, Sweden and Iceland—which have nearly identical partnership laws—will be recognized as such when in Denmark; and registered partners will be allowed to adopt each other's children unless the child was originally adopted from a foreign country.

The changes take effect July 1.

Bent Hansen, head of the National Association for Gays and Lesbians, says: "We welcome and celebrate this step toward total equality between the heterosexuals and us. Especially the possibility of adoption of stepchildren is an important signal recognizing the fact that gay and lesbian couples do have children. We have known that for a very long time; now the politicians also have realized that."

GERMANY

Fifty-four percent of Germans believe same-sex couples should be allowed to marry and to obtain the same rights as heterosexual couples, according to results of a Polis Institute survey released May 21.

Only 37 percent of those questioned disagreed with the idea.

German Lesbian and Gay Association spokesman Manfred Bruns calls the findings "a great success for the gay and lesbian civil rights policy.... Hostility toward lesbians and gays is losing more and more ground."

MEXICO

Gay and lesbian activists from the states of Veracruz, Tabasco, Campeche, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Yucatán and Quintana Roo will gather in the city of Veracruz July 16 to 18 for the first Southeast Gay/Lesbian Conference.

They hope to "exchange ideas, plans and projects as well as promote gay pride gatherings in other regions," says spokesman Juan Carvajal. "The idea is to divide the republic into five regions and stage pride gatherings in each place, and then have a national conference where all the proposals would lead to action and at the same time create an organization of gay and lesbian activist groups."

The Veracruz meeting will not be open to HIV-prevention or sexual-education organizations.

"We are only inviting groups or persons who are openly gay and proud of it, demonstrating it with work in defense of human rights, dignity and gay pride," Carvajal says.

For more information, send e-mail to claroscurogay@correoweb.com.

NETHERLANDS

Following in the footsteps of Amsterdam and The Hague, the Dutch city of Utrecht now has a "homomonument" of its own.

A plaque in the old Cathedral Square honors 18 men who were executed for homosexuality in the year 1730.

The site was chosen for its historical reputation as a gay cruising spot.

PANAMA

The national health care system, Caja de Seguro Social, agreed May 18 to give people with HIV the latest combination antiviral treatments.

The drugs will be provided both to people covered by the national plan and those who never paid into the system. About 1,500 people

are expected to receive treatment. Viral-load testing will be utilized to determine who receives the drugs first.

The decision followed street protests, a Supreme Court ruling and high-level CSS meetings. Hundreds of HIV-positive people blocked streets in central Panama City during a May 13 demonstration.

Costa Rica is the only other Central American nation whose national health care system provides the full spectrum of anti-HIV drugs. A case pending in the Supreme Court of El Salvador may open up the drug pipeline there.

THAILAND

The national broadcasting boss has ordered television networks to curb appearances by transvestites and transsexuals, the *South China Morning Post* reported May 19.



Kuliy Boonak said the proliferation of trans actors and characters on Thai programs "promote[s] sexual abnormalities."

Pakorn Pimthorn, a spokesman for Bangkok's Gay Group Against AIDS, denounced the move, saying, "Our appearance in television shows and soap operas cannot pose any influence to youth."

UNITED KINGDOM

On June 5, the Bank of Scotland scrapped a plan to launch a direct-banking venture with U.S. televangelist Pat Robertson following weeks of criticism from gay and lesbian activists, unions, civil libertarians, women's groups and politicians.

The final straw came when Robertson said on his 700 *Club* television show that Scotland is a "dark land" where "homosexuals are riding high in the media."

He added: "In Scotland, you can't believe how strong the homosexuals are."



Gay activists were the first to object to the bank's plan to offer mail, telephone and Internet banking to members of Robertson's Christian Coalition and viewers of his television program. The venture would have been 25 percent owned by Robertson.

The day before the deal was called off, the value of the bank's stock dropped by more than \$647 million.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's government will scrap Section 28 of the Local Government Act, Cabinet Office Minister Jack Cunningham said May 20.

The 11-year-old law prohibits cities from "intentionally promot[ing] homosexuality" and bans teaching "the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" in schools.

British gay and lesbian groups have battled the law since it was passed in the days of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

"Section 28 was wrong [then]. It is wrong in 1999. And it will go," Cunningham said at the annual dinner of the gay and lesbian lobby group Stonewall.

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