

Act MP sets up sex reform bill

by Jared Savage

A bill aimed at setting up New Zealand's first register of sex offenders is the latest step in a long campaign by new Act MP Deborah Coddington to eradicate sexual abuse.

Although new to the political arena, the 50-year-old mother of four has been campaigning for paedophilia law reform for over a decade.

Ms Coddington is a first-term list MP and her Sex Offenders Registry Bill was unanimously voted by Parliament to be sent to a select committee in July.

If passed, the legislation would require convicted sexual offenders to be registered on a database, which police and other agencies could access to prevent offences from occurring.

The information would not be publicly available, but would help police investigate sexual crimes and may speed up the elimination of possible suspects.

Ms Coddington is pleased with the success of her first private member's bill.

"I have been a Member of Parliament for just 12 months, so I am particularly delighted to see the bill not just introduced, but sent on its path to become law."

"Since the legislation was drawn from the ballot, I have spent a lot of time lobbying every political party to seek their support in principle

for this legislation," she says.

The author of five books (including *The 1996 Paedophile and Sex Offender Index*) and an award-winning writer, she attempted to prick society's conscience as an issues-driven journalist.

But Ms Coddington became frustrated with the limits of what she could do as a journalist.

"Winning awards was never my objective in journalism."

"I felt I was carping on from the sidelines and it was time to put my money where my pen was."

"I see journalism as an agent for change. But I felt frustrated because I couldn't see any changes happening, despite writing punchy stories about children being abused and books about sex offenders."

"I felt I was carping on from the sidelines and it was time to put my money where my pen was and try to do something from the inside."

Ms Coddington says greater protection from sexual offenders is long overdue.

"There had to be a way to keep close watch on such recidivist sexual predators, to stop them from slipping into different towns under assumed names and starting new cycles of sexual abuse."

"There are too many loopholes and gaps through which sexual predators can slip, only to harm innocent citizens — children, women and men."

"Even the Family Court has no such record of how many sexual offenders, or their partners, have been awarded custody of children."

Despite making an influential start in her short time as an MP, Ms Coddington has set herself greater goals to achieve.

"I hope that when I leave Parliament there will be no more journalists winning awards, as I did, for writing stories about little children being bashed to death by their families."

The passing of the sex offenders bill is the next important step to accomplishing her goals, Ms Coddington is adamant that the Government needs to do more to protect children.

"My sex offenders bill will not be the silver bullet. It needs to be taken in conjunction with other measures, like no parole, truth in sentencing, increased supervision upon release and, most importantly, education of children."

"Children need to know that they should tell an adult when someone touches them in a way



Deborah Coddington

National and Act: best buds?

by Nada Tielu

Murray McCully's drive to bring National and Act closer together appears to be working.

Mr McCully, National MP for East Coast Bays, says the two parties have been discussing "areas for co-operation".

He says former National leader Bill English, Act leader Richard Prebble and the two party presidents met for a private dinner at the end of August.

However, Mr McCully did not want to reveal what happened at the dinner, except to say that both parties are on track to form some sort of partnership.

National and Act have found common ground in the areas of economic policy and taxation rates.

Act wants to reduce company tax rates from 33% to 28%. This will make it lower than Australia's rate of 30%. National also wants to lower tax rates.

"You have got to make New Zealand more attractive for investors, which means you have got to have attractive tax rates," says Mr McCully.

Both parties also agree that personal tax rates need to be decreased.

"You need to have attractive personal tax rates too," says Mr McCully.

Act wants to go even further and impose a flat tax, where everyone would pay the same amount of tax regardless of income level.

Mr McCully also says there needs

to be more co-operation in Parliament between National and Act, and this co-operation needs to be planned instead of spasmodic.

He is not concerned about public perception of the differences in political principles between National and Act.

"I think people just need to harden up and understand the brutal realities of MMP."



Murray McCully

Act list MP Deborah Coddington agrees with Mr McCully.

"The message we are getting from people out there is that they don't care so much about differences between the two parties."

Mr McCully admits that an alliance between the two parties should help boost National's flagging image.

"We are at the bottom of the trough. You have to conclude that we need to work with someone else to

demonstrate that we can form a government together."

Mr McCully says a partnership would help National win more constituency seats at the next election and provide some competition for the current government.

Ms Coddington is supportive of a National-Act partnership.

"I think it's a very good idea." However, she also thinks National would have more to gain from an alliance with Act.

"I think we would enhance them more than they would enhance us."

Mr McCully says National's poor polling position is because the public has too many doubts.

"We need to work harder to spell out our position on issues."

Mr McCully was a guest speaker at Act's regional conference held in September.

He urged Act members to tell voters that National and Act could work and cooperate together as a coalition government.

According to Mr McCully, National and Act need to be united in the lead-up to the next election.

He says they need to follow the example of Labour and Alliance before the 1999 election by convincing voters they are compatible.

He says the reaction from Act members was very positive, although there was concern over tensions that might arise over Act's wishes to impose a flat tax.

Lack of trust in MPs keeps voters at home

by Reuben Bradley

Low voter turnout is fuelled by the lack of openness and honesty of our politicians, according to two New Zealand political observers.

Researcher Nicky Hager and Dr Helena Catt, senior lecturer in political studies at the University of Auckland, made these comments in the midst of a controversy surrounding a Corngate memo.

Dr Catt says the declining trust in what politicians say is dangerous to stable politics.

"With a democracy you need an informed and interested population. The biggest problem is that the declining trust destabilises democracy and then people are less likely to vote."

Mr Hager says the lack of accountability alienated ordinary people from politics.

He says the low voter turnout is a sign of people realising they aren't included in politics.

"It's come to be seen as not just acceptable but as clever tactics for politicians to be keeping most of what they do secret."

"Manipulation has a central place in the way governments do their work."

"It seems to me that that undermines a democratic government. The short term problem is that it's easier

for the Government to do what they like," says Mr Hager.

Dr Catt and Mr Hager both agree the problem is worldwide and not exclusive to New Zealand.

Mr Hager says there is a worldwide growth of running governments by public relations, and New Zealand needs a bigger debate over whether this is acceptable.

"You don't have to have your politicians outright lying to cause trouble. They massage and spin the truth, so that the public don't get the truth."

Dr Catt says the overseas situation is worse than in New Zealand.

"Did Bush and Blair lie to their respective voters about going to war with Iraq? That's much bigger than Corngate. There was the whole Bill Clinton thing with Monica."

The controversy with the Corngate memo revolves around the non-release of a message that the Prime Minister promised would be released.

Her most senior official, Dr Mark Prebble, said he, without Helen Clark's knowledge, decided to withhold the document, in which adviser Ruth Wilkie told Clark corn contamination could not be discounted.

Mr Hager says the sensible thing for the Government to do would have been to admit they had done something wrong.

North Shore politicians divided on abolishing Maori seats

by Sebastian van der Zwan

North Shore City MPs are at odds over the issue of whether to abolish Maori seats in Parliament.

National MPs Murray McCully, MP for East Coast Bays, and Wayne Mapp, MP for North Shore, are following former party leader Bill English's call to get rid of the Maori seats.

Mr McCully says the adoption of the MMP electoral system has led to increased Maori representation in Parliament and this makes the seats irrelevant.

"My own view is that they are part of a bygone era. The purpose they were created for is no longer necessary."

However, Anne Hartley, Labour MP for

Northcote, says Maori seats in Parliament are important, and abolishing them would dishonour the Treaty of Waitangi. "It would certainly be a breach of good faith."

Mrs Hartley says it is not Government's place to choose whether or not the Maori seats are abolished.

"It is a Maori decision. When they want to abolish them, they will."

But Paul Adams, a United Future list MP based on the North Shore, disagrees, saying the views of all New Zealanders should be taken into account.

He says debate about Maori seats in Parliament is timely, given the adoption of MMP, and the public should not be afraid to discuss the issue.

Mr McCully and Mr Mapp say voters on the

North Shore are overwhelmingly in support of abolishing the seats.

Mr McCully says: "The feedback I've had is that a vast majority of my constituents are enthusiastic about the abolition of the Maori seats."

He says many people, including Maori, feel voters should not be divided by race.

Mr Mapp says his polls indicate that about 70% of his electorate supports the abolition of Maori seats.

However, Mrs Hartley says the growing number of people enrolled to vote on the Maori roll shows the seats are gaining popularity.

There were over 194,000 people enrolled on the Maori roll before the 2002 election, compared to less than 160,000 before the 1999 election.

John Tamihere, Labour MP for Tamaki

Makaurau, says National's call for the Maori seats to be abolished is just the party "trying to find themselves some turf".

He says Maori seats in Parliament will eventually outlive their usefulness and have to be abolished - just not now.

"Should they go? I think one day they will. Bill English's idea was good. But, as usual, his timing was wrong."

Ian Stuart, a Maori studies lecturer at the Eastern Institute of Technology, says Maori, like pakeha, are divided on the issue, but the majority are in favour of keeping the seats.

"This debate needs to be seen in the context of a sharing of power between Maori and non-Maori."

"The seats guarantee Maori representation and a Maori voice in Parliament."