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### NEW DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP LAWS UNVEILED

New laws overhauling the State's outdated definition of what constitutes a domestic relationship will be unveiled in Parliament today by Attorney-General, Michael Atkinson.

"It's the biggest change to the law governing couple relationships in South Australia since *de facto* relationships were defined in the *Family Relationships Act 1975*," Mr Atkinson says.

"To now qualify as a domestic partnership, a couple, must live together in a close personal relationship, in a genuine domestic basis for three or more years, or three out of four years.

The new *Domestic Partners Bill 2006* will fulfil the Rann Government's pledge to introduce a Bill to end unjustified discrimination against same sex couples in the first session of Parliament after the election.

"A same-sex couple may share property and financial affairs and provide care for each other during periods of illness or disability just like a couple of the opposite sex," Mr Atkinson says.

"It is indefensible that our law recognises one type of couple and not the other."

In February 2003, the Government published a discussion paper proposing changes to the law to remove unjustified discrimination against same-sex couples, looking particularly at matters of inheritance, health, care and parenting. Some 2,000 submissions were received.

A first attempt to introduce a Bill to Parliament in December 2004 was later withdrawn and referred to Legislative Review Committee. Another Bill was introduced last year, but it was not considered by both Houses before the Parliament was prorogued.

"Nothing in all the discussion of earlier Bills has persuaded this Government that same-sex couples who live together as life partners on a genuine domestic basis do not deserve the same legal recognition as those enjoyed by opposite-sex *de facto* couples," Mr Atkinson says.

"Whilst this is an important step in the removal of unjustified discrimination against same-sex relationships, that is by no means the only benefit." Mr Atkinson says.

"The new Act will dispense with the old *de facto* term and re-categorise all couples meeting the criteria under a new term as Domestic Partners.

“The new term can mean what we currently understand as existing *de facto* couples, same-sex couples or indeed other people who live and present themselves as a couple.”

“The Bill does not discriminate against couples who live in a non-sexual relationship.” Mr Atkinson says.

“For most purposes, the parties do not have to take any formal step to secure the legal recognition of the relationship. Once the criteria are met, the relationship is recognised automatically as a matter of law in the same way *de facto* relationships acquire recognition.”

“Marriage is constitutionally a matter for the Commonwealth and it is not affected by this Bill.”

“This Bill, like that tabled by the Government last year will not amend adoption or reproductive technology laws to allow access to same-sex couples.”

The new law will apply not only to partnerships that are formed in the future but also to those that now exist.