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14 Nov. 1983

A-G hints at new gay law

The Attorney-General, Mr Michael Thomas, has hinted that the Law Reform Commission's controversial proposal to decriminalise homosexual relations between consenting adults may be replaced by a proposal to revise sentences meted out to homosexual offenders.

He has also said he is hoping that the Government will decide "within a very short time" whether to act on the commission's proposals on homosexuality.

Interviewed on the ATV English channel's *Newsline* programme last night, Mr Thomas said alternatives to decriminalisation were being considered following meetings between himself and representatives of Dr Philemon Choi's anti-decriminalisation group.

"We have been looking — I think with the members of that group contributing a great deal — to some options which have not been put forward by the Law Reform Commission at all, and that particularly is in relation to the penalties presently under the law for that kind of homosexual behaviour

and it is possible that we shall be reaching decisions on these lines fairly soon."

Mr Thomas said he realised that public opinion was divided on the decriminalisation question, but he defended the proposals contained in the commission's 200-page report.

"The public have not absorbed all the arguments that were put forward in support of the one proposal that was controversial — there were many others that I think were not controversial — that is to say the decriminalisation of homosexual behaviour between consenting adults," he said.

"On that topic we have tried to monitor the debate, we have tried to contribute to it in the sense of correcting misapprehensions."

He said there were arguments for decriminalisation which had been overlooked by the community.

"It is a matter on which the man in the street, the woman in the street, has very strong personal convictions, and some of them are not prepared to wade through 200 pages of close print in order to see exactly what the arguments of the Law Reform Commission were."

Mr Thomas was asked to suggest a timetable for the Government to introduce legislation based on the commission's report on homosexuality.

He replied: "I would certainly hope that within a very short time there will be firm decisions reached by Government as to what is to be done."