

Inquiry into Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members

Inquiry into Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010

I write in support of marriage equality. That is, I urge the parliament to support equal rights for same-sex relationships that are afforded to opposite-sex relationships.

The real life impact of marriage discrimination

I live with my same-sex partner and our two children. We are just like any other loving and supportive family.

Like any parent, we want our kids to grow up free of stigmatisation and discrimination. However, this dream is made difficult by the current definition of marriage which excludes me and my partner's participation. This in turn sends a message to our children that their parents' relationship is inferior to a heterosexual relationship.

The current legal discrimination against our family legitimises discrimination against our family – and is highly likely to encourage and legitimise teasing and discrimination of our children (and the many children with same-sex parents). Simply, it means that our children grow up thinking their family is of less value than others..

To institutionalise discrimination in this way has a real affect on my family and my children. We just want to live an ordinary life in a family with the same rights as every other. There are many other same-sex families like ours with children and I urge the senate to remove discrimination against these families.

What Australia thinks

There is growing support for marriage equality. Surveys show that almost two out of three Australians believe that same sex-couples should be able to marry, and the percentage is demonstrated as growing survey after survey. In fact, we are now at a point where 75% of Australians think that marriage equality is inevitable, with less

than 20% thinking it is not inevitable (Galaxy poll 2010). These numbers are consistent with other polling agencies, including

- Newspann (65% have no problem with same-sex marriage, November 2010);
- Westpoll (61% support in WA, December 2010); and
- Neilson (57% support nationally, November 2010).

This level of support in Australia is far higher than that in other countries where same sex marriage is now legal. For example:

- Canada had only 46% support prior to the reform; and
- Of the five US states, only about 53% supported marriage equality.

Since the marriage equality reforms in those countries, support has increased dramatically, and the vast majority of those populations do not have an issue with the reforms.

Changing values of society

As a society, we have moved away from discrimination according to family type. In the timeframe of less than a generation, we have significantly reduced discrimination around marriage. We no longer discriminate against children born out of wedlock; we no longer discriminate by race or colour; we no longer discriminate against what we used to call “broken” marriages; or against single parent families. However, we do still discriminate unnecessarily against families with parents of the same sex.

The changing values of society towards same-sex marriage has changed dramatically over recent years and will continue to do so. Over the six years from 2004 to 2010, support for same-sex marriage has grown from 38% to 62% (2004 Newspann; 2010 Galaxy poll).

Why not civil unions

I am asking that discrimination be removed so that my family can live on an equal basis as all other families. To deny us the rights of marriage and instead allow a civil union means that our family will continue to be discriminated against. Civil unions are simply not equal to marriage.

Religious groups

Religious groups may complain that they be forced to officiate in same-sex marriage ceremonies. I am not asking that any organisation or any person be forced to officiate in a same-sex marriage, and I do not believe that others are asking this. It would be reasonable to include a specific clause in the legislation to allow any religious group or any individual the right to refuse to officiate in any particular wedding ceremony (whether same-sex; different-sex; same religion; or different religion).

Conclusion

Our family just wants to be like any other normal family. We are not seeking special rights – we are just seeking the same treatment as any other family. Just like any family, we don't want to be discriminated against through the legal system. We are not seeking anything that will harm other people, but rather we are seeking the same rights as any other family.

In summary, marriage equality:

1. grants my partner and I equality under the law by recognising that our relationship is just as important as any other;
2. is in the best interest of children. It means that children of same-sex families are afforded the same opportunities as other children and removes discrimination from their lives;
3. does not impact upon other families, and does not dilute the value of marriage; and
4. is supported by a majority of Australians, and a growing proportion of Australians.

For the sake of our children, and for the sake of other children with same-sex parents, I ask that the Australian parliament please remove the current discriminatory legislation against same-sex marriage.

I thank the Committee for their time and consideration. If the Committee would like more information, I would be available to appear before the Committee or would be available to provide further information or evidence.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Snow