



VICTORIAN GAY & LESBIAN RIGHTS LOBBY

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Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010*

1. Introduction

The Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby (**VGLRL**) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Inquiry on its inquiry into the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010* (Cth).

The VGLRL is a community based lobby group which works towards equality, social justice and human rights for lesbian, gay, queer, bisexual and same sex attracted Victorians. We work with, and for the community, along with non-profit, health and representatives of government agencies to create positive change in the area of human rights and policy development. In particular, the VGLRL works consultatively, cooperatively and respectfully with transgender, bisexual, intersex and other organisations that support our mission and vision.

The VGLRL supports and endorses submissions made on the topic of marriage equality by the NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, Transgender Victoria and Organisation Intersex International Australia.

The VGLRL is a proud partner of the Marriage Equality Matters campaign, a joint-campaign of state and federal LGBTI rights groups from across Australia. Marriage Equality Matters tells the stories of people like you who believe that every Australian should have equal rights, and should have equal access to marriage.

2. The importance of marriage equality

In Australia, thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (**LGBTI**) people are denied the legal right to marry their partner. The VGLRL has campaigned for many years on the issue of marriage equality and has long called on the Australian Government to change the definition of marriage under the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth) (**Marriage Act**). In its current form, the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth) (the **Marriage Act**) legalises and entrenches unacceptable discrimination against LGBTI people. The exclusion of LGBTI people from the Marriage Act denies them a right that is afforded to all other Australians.

The importance of achieving equality in the area of relationship recognition has been underscored in recent times by the growing support for reform in this area within Australia, including the recent endorsement of these principles at the 2011 ALP National Conference.

Australia lags behind the global shift towards marriage equality reflected in recent developments in a number of nations around the world.

3. Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010 (Cth)

The VGLRL supports the proposed changes under section 3 of the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010* (Cth) to remove discrimination against people on the basis of their sex, sexual orientation and gender identity.

4. Modifications since 2009 Inquiry into Marriage Equality

The 2010 Bill contains certain modifications when compared to the earlier bill for marriage equality that was the subject of the 2009 inquiry. The VGLRL commends:

- use of the term 'sexual orientation' in place of 'sexuality' in throughout the 2010 Bill;
- insertion of the words 'to the exclusion of all others'; and
- amendment to Items 2 and 4 of the Schedule (words to be recited by the celebrant) to simply state "partner".

5. House Bills

The 2010 Bill is substantially similar to two additional Bills currently under consideration by the House of Representatives. The VGLRL strongly urges the relevant members of parliament to co-operate and achieve agreement on the preferred text to ensure the passage of marriage equality legislation as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby