

SUBMISSION ON THE MARRIAGE EQUALITY AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing to convey my strong support for the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010. I believe all same-sex couples should have the right to marry and be truly equal.

This Bill is important in removing discrimination against same-sex couples and in providing full legal equality.

I believe that excluding same-sex couples from marriage further reinforces the feeling of alienation and abnormality that many gay people feel - particularly young people like myself.

In modern Australia, families are varied and diverse. Increasingly, families are comprised of long term same-sex relationships. 25% of female couples and 15% of male couples are currently raising children. This Bill will help promote and validate these relationships, which are often seen as second-class.

I support provisions of the Bill which allow religious celebrants to refuse to marry same-sex partners, just like they can refuse to marry other couples now.

I oppose civil unions as a substitute for full marriage equality. I believe this will entrench same-sex couples as second-class citizens unworthy of real equality.

Marriage equality is not an unpopular or controversial issue. According to a 2010 Galaxy poll, 62% of Australians support the right of same-sex couples to marry. Among my own demographic of 18-25 year-olds that figure rises to 80%.

It is important to remember that it is not only same-sex couples who wish for marriage equality, but everyday Australians who strongly believe that their sons, daughters and friends should not be treated differently to themselves.

Consider my own situation. My parents were married in 1980. They were able to celebrate their love publicly with their friends and family. It was the happiest day of their lives. My parents now look forward to celebrating with my sister and my brother on their own wedding days. Yet they also realise with great sadness and regret that under the law I am not equal enough to share that happiness too.

I would like to also address the misinformation being peddled by some fringe groups concerning children raised by same-sex couples. These groups argue that the 'ideal' situation for children is to have a married mother and father and that children raised by same-sex couples are disadvantaged.

These assertions are hurtful and insulting and are not supported by the world's major psychological bodies.

The American Psychological Association for example concluded that "...there is no evidence to suggest that lesbian women or gay men are unfit to be parents...not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents."¹

The Australian Psychological Society agrees, noting that "No evidence supports the view that the ideal gender mix of parents is a man and a woman."²

Statistics show rapidly increasing support for marriage equality - particularly among younger people. I believe future generations will look back at the discrimination of gay couples with disbelief and shame.

I would like to end by quoting the great writer, musician and composer Tim Minchin on history as a judge of character:

"History is a brutal judge of a society's human rights record. For example... the USA looks with pride upon its early uptake of freedom of speech, but with shame upon the pre-1967 illegality of interracial marriage. Every year that goes by without marriage reform adds to the embarrassment with which future generations will recall our discrimination against same-sex couples. And history will judge most harshly those who object most ardently to this inevitable change."

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission,

Benjamin Heathwood

¹ <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/parenting-full.pdf>

² <http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/LGBT-Families-Lit-Review.pdf>