

Submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010

I am a 27-year-old gay man who has been living in and continues to live in a loving and committed relationship with another man for the past 4.5 years. As a Jew, my religion allows us to get married in the eyes of God and we are planning our wedding ceremony for the 27th of January 2013. We are overjoyed that our religious community is coming together to recognise our love and support our commitment to live the rest of our lives together.

In reality, recognition of our union by the state emotionally means very little. The reason for this is because what *really* matters to us is that our family, friends and above all, our God, recognise us as married and committed for life. However, recognition by the state of our union from a secular point of view only makes sense. To ignore the existence of something that is already happening is foolhardy.

Marriage is not limited to any single organised religion and no religion has a monopoly on what a “marriage” is – it universally appears across many cultures and unrelated religions. I believe that the yearning to find a partner and live your life, sharing every moment with that one person is a universal and very human feeling. It is something that doesn’t come to everyone, but if you have the luck to find the one person out of 7 billion that you want to grow old with, you should be allowed to do it. It’s hard enough to find someone who will love you in the first place!

I am immensely proud of this beautiful nation that we live in. Australia has been at the forefront of so much social change that had made our country

better, stronger, and more egalitarian than so many other countries around the world. Australia has historically levelled the playing field for her citizens every time that an inequality was realised – universal suffrage, eradication of the White Australia policy and the consequential turn around in improved immigration standards, apologising to the Lost Generation, and equalising the field for homosexuals in *almost* every part of secular life! This is an impressive list.

Australia has legislated that homosexuals be treated equally in the following areas of secular life:

- Recognition of Australian Defence Force members' same-sex partners;
- Recognition of same-sex couples in all areas of government employment;
- Equal access family benefits under the Medicare Safety Net and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme;
- Carer's leave for same-sex de facto couples;
- Superannuation;
- Taxation;
- Succession laws;
- Equal access to Medicare;
- Equal treatment for Centrelink benefits;
- Equal treatment for same-sex couples in immigration laws;
- Legal adoption for same-sex couples in certain states.

And that is just a few of them! There are so many other areas where Australia has said "no" to treating homosexuals differently simply based on their orientation. Even to the most conservative mind, the idea of treating same-sex attracted people differently simply because they are who they are, is repugnant.

With all of these reforms, **a same-sex de facto couple is the same as a married couple for all intents and purposes.** The only real difference is that a de facto visa costs more than a prospective marriage visa... and the word “marriage”. It is literally a semantic shift.

Australia has been an enlightened and exceedingly egalitarian country and has been a beacon of hope for so many people around the world when it comes to the treatment of homosexuals. And that attitude is reflected in the statistics surrounding the immense popular support for these reforms.

The majority of Australians support this reform, with **62%** of all Australians across the board agreeing that it's time. Australians with children on average support this reform even more so at **72%**. Further, **three-quarters** of the Australian population believe that this reform is inevitable.

What is even more profound is that 25% of female same-sex couples and 15% of male same-sex couples are raising children. I know that I personally plan on raising children, because being gay doesn't mean that I am infertile and it is my procreative right to have a child. Allowing same-sex marriage to finally be recognised by the government would give those children the security that their parents are married, and no one can take that away from them.

I can understand that not all religions are keen on the idea of same-sex marriage, but in a secular state, their religious beliefs should not be pushed onto the majority of Australians who actually *want* this reform to happen.

I am not Christian. I do not think it is fair that a particular group's religious opinion should have any weight in the debate on a secular state. The supposed

biblical prohibitions on same-sex unions are not relevant to a secular debate. If they were, then divorce would be illegal and we would stone adulterers to death. Clearly we don't do that in Australia, so religious considerations have no place in this secular debate.

However, I do not wish for religious organisations that do not condone same-sex marriages to be forced to solemnise those unions. Therefore, I support 100% the religious freedom for those organisations to respectfully decline to perform those ceremonies. Besides, what same-sex couple would want to force a church or synagogue that doesn't believe that they even matter, to preside over the happiest day of their lives?

So, in conclusion, I suppose that in my opinion, the biggest considerations to take into account in this debate are the following:

1. Same-sex couples are already having children legally, adopting legally, and living in marriage-like relationships. Therefore, recognition of those unions in a secular law would have only a positive impact on the children of those relationships. They already exist and to ignore them would be at the state's and those children's own peril.
2. Freedom *from* religion is so important. To force the religious opinions of some onto others who do not share those opinions is illegal and morally wrong (it's also not in line with modern Australian sensibilities when it comes to the separation of church and state). State sanctioned marriage is, and always has been, a secular institution. *Religious marriages are clearly distinct*, separate from secular marriage, and religious organisations are free to not solemnise those unions.

3. Recognising that same-sex marriages already exist in Australia will only go towards ensuring that marriage remains relevant in secular Australian society. The more the merrier!
4. Lastly, it would mean the world to all the same-sex couples out there, to all the same-sex attracted youth in Australia, and to the children of same-sex families. Send them the message that we are all going to be all right, and that they are not inferior, nor damaged, nor somehow unworthy of equality. Let them know that they get a fair go too.

This reform means nothing to its opponents. They don't get anything out of defeating this bill. They oppose it for their own reasons, but even if the majority of Australians didn't want this reform, a universal human right is never up to popular opinion. The right thing to do is simply that – the right thing to do. Further, when this reform is finally enacted, it will mean *the world* to so many people; not just to gays and lesbians, but to our supporters, our families, our friends, our children and our communities that can now finally attend a legal same-sex wedding!

As I said before, recognition by the state can never compare to the recognition we already have from our family, friends, and our God. But it would go a long way to ensuring that equality prevails and that Australia can again be one of the countries that sets the right example and continues to be a beacon of hope for the world. We are all Australians, and we are all equal – it's time the laws of this country reflected that reality.