

To whom it may concern,

I would like to express my support for the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012. I would also like to suggest some possible changes you could make to ensure that the bill is even fairer to all Australians.

I know this bill is very controversial but we have to stop allowing certain religious ideals and discriminative personal opinions inhibit our growth as a forward thinking, progressive and successful nation. There was a time when it was perfectly acceptable to discriminate based on race or gender and we look back at that time now with shame and disbelief that we could ever have been so ignorant. We really need this bill to be passed in this parliamentary term so we can begin to dilute the bigotry of certain which is only gaining momentum even though that those groups are shrinking and begin the process of making all Australians feel welcome here and be proud to call Australia home.

Growing up I always knew I was attracted to females. As a child I was in awe of the softness and gentle, nurturing spirit of women. I have a loving, nurturing and affectionate mother. I have a loving, hard-working and affectionate father. I have 5 siblings. I have over 20 cousins and we'd all get together for Christmas or birthdays. It was an awesome childhood! It wasn't until I was 15 years old that I fell in love with a girl. We went to an all girls Catholic school and to this day she has no idea I was in love with her. We caught the bus together and on the last day of the school term I would go to her house and colour her hair all kinds of crazy colours because of course we weren't allowed to have pink hair at a girls Catholic school. It was a sweet and innocent, close friendship on the surface and inside all I felt was guilt, disgust and anguish. Being gay was not ok. Not in my world. I felt alone. I was anxious. I was depressed. I had this feeling in my core that if I could just make it to 23 I would be ok. I would get married and have children with a man because I love kids so much that it would make up for the fact that I wasn't attracted to my partner. Or I would move up or down the coast and live alone but where no one would ever know my secret.

Fast forward to 23. 2 weeks before my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday actually and something amazing happened. I met this amazing creature. Soft and sweet as pie but strong and protective. This person happens to be female. It took all the courage in the world to let the people in our lives know about us but I wouldn't take back a second of that nervousness or discomfort. She is my everything. She runs to open the door as soon as she hears me rattling my keys on the other side when I get home from work. She always goes to the wardrobe to grab me a cardigan if we're heading out "just in case" I get cold. She pretends to be fascinated whenever I paint my fingernails a new colour. Sometimes she even buys that new colour for me! She is an amazing, engaging and fun aunty to my 6 nieces and nephews. She drops my grandmother home after every family function as Nan tells her the same exact stories every single time and she feigns interest each time. We'll have been together for 4 years this January and we got engaged in June on a gorgeous beach in Port Douglas at sunset. I would love nothing more than to call her my wife and to be honest I think this new bill should and will be the first step. Sometimes people need to be forced out of discrimination. We would love nothing more than to be able to drive up the coast and just check into a motel without getting strange looks when we ask for a queen room instead of a twin (believe me that happens 9/10 times!). We would also like to be able sit in our nursing home at 95 and hold hands as our dozens of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren run around knowing that we will be together when one of us takes out final breath (I have already told her I'm going first because I couldn't live without her. She's just as stubborn as me though so it will

be a fight to the finish line on that one!). In all my life I have never seen a relationship like ours. The only thing we ever argue about is politics and in the end we generally agree to disagree on certain issues, promise to do research on the other side of the argument and hug it out. After four years we still can't be away from each other for more than a couple of hours without sending an "I miss you" text. We both work full time, study and have 2 side businesses together but always find time for a chat or a cuddle. We are best friends and encourage each other at the gym and to get that assignment in on time and be proud of the job we've done at the end of the day. How could anyone possibly have a problem with our relationship?

The Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012 should include the term 'relationship status' because people like Kate and I feel married but we're not because we can't be just yet (we certainly will be one day!). The LGBTI community is just as strong, community-minded and important as any other group and should be protected from discrimination by having a true representative in the Australian Human Rights Commission to help in our fight for equality. The LGBTI community is not getting any smaller and certainly not going to stop fighting to stop discrimination. We need to set the wheels in motion now to ensure Australia has a future free of discrimination and hatred for all of its people.

I thank you for taking the time to read my story and I just hope that you can understand that people like myself and my beautiful fiancé Kate are not trying to step on anyone else's rights. We're just trying to live our lives like any other loving and supportive couple out there. Like any other human being. We need the government to step in and help us get there. I know we'll get there but we need your help. Please help us?

Kind regards,

Jo Lillicot