



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

SUBMISSION ON THE MARRIAGE EQUALITY AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Let's Get Equal Campaign is a community-based organisation which formed in 2000 to campaign for equal legal rights for same-sex couples who currently suffer discrimination. We strongly support the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010*. We acknowledge that there has been much legislative change in Australia over a number of years which has improved the lives of gay and lesbian Australians, however significant discrimination continues to exist in Australian law.

The current *Marriage Act* is a discriminatory law which deprives some Australians of full legal recognition of their relationships. Many gay and lesbian Australians live in loving, committed and mutually supportive relations and wish to formalise their relationships through marriage. Young gay and lesbian Australians aspire to the same opportunities to develop their future relationships and the same life chances that exist for their heterosexual peers. The current law is not a law for all Australians. It significantly, symbolically and practically declares that the relationships of gay and lesbian Australians are less valid and less valued than those of opposite-sex couples. The *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill* is therefore an important step towards providing legal equality for same-sex partners and removing discrimination against them.

Gay and lesbian Australians have chosen to express their commitment to each other by having a legal marriage in another country and others have migrated to Australia after having married in their home country. The loving commitment made by such couples is not recognised in Australia and such couples have greater rights and recognition outside Australia than they have living here. Part of the reality of such relationships is stripped away when married couples come to Australia and the nature of their commitment to each other is invalidated by current Australian law. Opposite-sex couples do not suffer the same denial of their relationships.

The *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill* will work to remove discrimination against gay and lesbian couples by permitting marriage between two people regardless of sex, sexuality or gender identity and by recognising same-sex marriages legally entered into in other countries.

There is an increasing international trend towards the recognition of same-sex marriage, including in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Spain, the Netherlands, Iceland, Mexico, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, South Africa and several states in the USA. In these countries, same-sex marriage has been recognised legally because to fail to do so would perpetuate an injustice to gay and lesbian people. The experience of these countries shows that such marriages play a positive role in the lives of gay and lesbian couples and in society as a whole.

We believe that the Bill will strengthen relationships, families and marriage, and will make Australia a fairer and more inclusive nation. The majority of Australians support marriage equality and the existing discriminatory laws mean that the views of a minority of Australians are permitted to determine the opportunities, happiness and lives of others. Religious bodies will still have the right to determine who can be married in religious ceremonies. However, in a secular society, where there is a separation between Church and State, it is important that conservative religious views do not restrict who the state can marry. The right to marry is a right which can and should be enjoyed by all Australians and extending this right to same-sex couples does not infringe in any way on the rights of others.