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ATTORNEY-GENERAL  
THE HON ROBERT McCLELLAND MP

RECEIVED  
07 APR 2011  
BY: JA

RECEIVED  
13 APR 2011  
PETITIONS COMMITTEE

AG-MC11/02567

The Hon John Murphy MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

29 MAR 2011

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Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 1 March 2010 regarding a petition submitted to the Standing Committee of Petitions about equal access to marriage.

The Australian Government gave its support to an amended notice of motion on same-sex marriage moved by Mr Adam Bandt MP, Member for Melbourne. The amended motion called on Members of Parliament to gauge the views of their constituents on equal treatment for same-sex couples, including marriage. The Government acknowledges that this is an important discussion for constituents to have with their Members of Parliament.

The Government believes that the definition of marriage in the *Marriage Act 1961*—that marriage is between a man and a woman—is appropriate. The Government also believes that couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life should be able to have their relationships recognised. The Government supports a nationally consistent framework for relationship recognition to be implemented by the States and Territories. New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have established relationship recognition schemes, where the relationship is legally recognised by the act of registration. Relationships registered under these schemes are also now recognised in a wide range of Commonwealth laws. The Government will continue to encourage other jurisdictions to develop such schemes.

The Government's commitment to removing discrimination was demonstrated by its reforms in 2008–09 to remove discrimination from 85 Commonwealth laws. These reforms, which passed in 2009, removed discrimination and equalised treatment for same-sex couples in areas of taxation, social security, health, aged care, superannuation, immigration, child support and family law. These reforms extend to same-sex couples the same entitlements and obligations that apply to opposite-sex couples. Equal treatment means some same-sex couples will get access to benefits they could not previously access.

The Government recently committed to introducing protections against discrimination on the basis of a person's sexual orientation or gender status. This will involve the development of legislation to protect against discrimination on the basis of a person's sexual orientation or gender status as part of its review and consolidation of federal anti-discrimination laws into a single Act. The Government will undertake consultation with stakeholders on the proposed single anti-discrimination law.

I hope this information is of assistance to the Committee when considering this petition.

Yours sincerely

Robert McClelland