



Office of the Commissioner

30 March, 2012

Dr Anna Dacre
Secretary
Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
House of Representatives
Parliament House

Re submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs regarding the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012* and the *Marriage Amendment Bill 2012*

The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory appreciates the opportunity to submit its views to this Standing Committee in relation to the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012. The Salvation Army's Australia Southern Territory comprises the states of Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory and this submission is made on behalf of these states.

Noting the objectives of the Bills, namely,

- (a) to remove from the Marriage Act 1961 discrimination against people on the basis of their sex, sexual orientation and gender identity; and
- (b) to recognise that freedom of sexual orientation and gender identity are fundamental human rights; and
- (c) to promote acceptance and the celebration of diversity

and, in the case of Mr Jones' Bill,

to amend the *Marriage Act 1961* to ensure equal access to marriage for all adult couples irrespective of sex who have a mutual commitment to a shared life.

We comment as follows:

The Salvation Army, both internationally and within Australia, has a long history of non-discriminatory action. We firmly believe in assisting and working with all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and our history demonstrates this fundamental belief.

Saying that, we retain our very firm conviction that the institution of marriage is, by definition, an act solely between a man and a woman. This should not be altered in any way.

To hold this position is not to make any comment about gay and lesbian relationships; it is, rather, to strongly affirm and uphold the sanctity of marriage as being only and always between a man and a woman.

The Salvation Army's Positional Statement on marriage articulates this very clearly:

In spite of changing lifestyles and values, the family unit - father, mother and children - is still the ideal social institution in contemporary Australian life.

By marriage the family remains the basic source of nurture, of love, of economic and other life supports, of fundamental education and socialization and of spiritual and moral development. Other social institutions serve best as supportive resources.

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In the face of emerging alternative lifestyles and modes of living, which in recent years have grown in incidence and open acceptance, The Salvation Army affirms its absolute conviction that the marriage of one man to one woman is a sacred institution ordained by God and that a traditional good-faith commitment to an indissoluble union is one of the most rewarding of life's decisions for any man or woman, providing the optimal conditions for family life.

We encourage married couples to continually seek ways to enrich their relationship and to seek counselling quickly should difficulties arise.

We encourage parents to discover how best to develop a close relationship of mutual trust and respect with their children and to accept responsibility for their children's physical, moral and spiritual growth and well being.

The Salvation Army acknowledges that many people today find themselves in situations outside the ideal stated above. Persons in such circumstances should always be encouraged to feel totally accepted within The Salvation Army.

Thus The Salvation Army, through all its programmes and services, seeks to strengthen marriage and enrich family life.

The Salvation Army, therefore, respectfully calls upon the Australian Parliament to hold strongly to the Marriage Act, 1961, and to resist any move to amend it as per the Bills being considered here by the Standing Committee.

Our view, while founded in our Biblical theology, is reinforced every day through our engagement with thousands of individuals and families throughout Australia. To tear down a foundational stone of society in this manner would only add to the sense of brokenness and dislocation which already exists in Australian society.

To suggest that the fundamental destruction of the foundational institution of marriage would in some way be a "celebration of diversity" is to completely misunderstand the nature of the institution of marriage. Diversity and acceptance are encouraged within society, but always within appropriate limits decided upon and observed by the vast majority for the common good. To somehow suggest that the establishment of appropriate mores and laws for the common good is to infringe upon human rights is to see the issue from only one limited perspective and not through the lens of the greater, common good of society.

The Salvation Army calls upon the government and all members in the Australian Parliament to oppose these amendments. We also supply with this letter a more comprehensive document, *Marriage and the Recognition of Same-Sex Unions*, as an addendum. This expands upon the statements made in this more concise submission.

Yours most sincerely,



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Australia Southern Territory
(Incorporating: Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory)