



23 March 2012

**Inquiry into the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012* and the *Marriage Amendment Bill 2012*  
Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Social Policy & Legal Affairs  
from the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Australia**

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) originated in 17<sup>th</sup> century England as a movement seeking to return to what Friends regarded as the original spiritual basis of Christianity, without set liturgy and without priests, as they believed everyone capable of direct communication with God.

Quakers have developed ongoing commitments to *testimonies* which invite our active engagement in daily life, including testimonies on peace, justice and equality. Our views on marriage arise out of the testimony on equality and justice.

Friends regard marriage and commitment as a fundamentally spiritual matter. A founding Quaker George Fox said in 1669: *For the right joining of marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests' or magistrates'; for it is God's ordinance, not man's; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together: for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses.* Quaker marriage has therefore meant that the couple declare their vows before God and before Friends in a special Meeting for Worship for Marriage.

In recent years, as a result of our consistently held belief in the equal worth of all people, Australian Friends have recognised that committed, same-sex relationships are as valuable as other committed and loving relationships, and have celebrated same-sex commitment ceremonies within their Meetings. While outwardly similar to Quaker marriage, these ceremonies do not have legal standing in Australia because the *Marriage Act (1961)* currently only recognises the union between a man and a woman as a valid legal marriage.

After many years of careful and at times painful discussion and deep division, Australian Friends gathered for Yearly Meeting 2010 agreed to the following statement:

*Australia Yearly Meeting has agreed to treat all requests for celebration of marriage within our Meetings in accordance with Friends' usages, regardless of the sexual orientation or gender of each of the partners. Where marriages are not able to be legally recognised, Friends celebrate the spiritual aspects of the wedding ceremony. Australia Yearly Meeting hopes that the law relating to marriage will be amended to allow Regional meetings to support all couples to full and equal recognition of their marriages.*

*Handbook of Practice and Procedure (6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2011)*

**Australia Yearly Meeting**

The Religious Society of Friends  
(Quakers) in Australia Inc.  
Incorporated in the ACT  
PO Box 556 Kenmore  
Queensland 4069  
Australia

Tel (07) 3201 2685

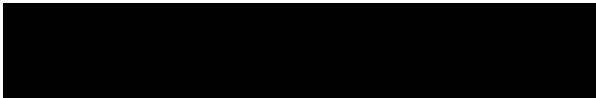
Email [ymsecretary@quakers.org.au](mailto:ymsecretary@quakers.org.au)

Web [www.quakers.org.au](http://www.quakers.org.au)

ABN 16 036 715 933



In informing the Inquiry of this history and our perspectives, we point out the Christian foundations of contemporary Quakers. While we acknowledge that some other denominations oppose making marriage available to same-sex couples, it should be noted that those views are not representative of all Christians in Australia.



Maxine C Cooper  
Presiding Clerk  
Australia Yearly Meeting  
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia