

Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009

Submission from the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir

The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir strongly supports the purpose of this Bill because members of the Choir believe that there is no place in Australia for discrimination on the basis of sexuality and gender identity. While the Marriage Act 1961 continues to exist, Australians do not all have equal rights to be married, regardless of sex, sexuality and gender identity. Choir members believe that same-sex couples are entitled to equal marriage rights and that unions entered into abroad should be recognised as legitimate.

The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir (SGLC) actively pursues a Gay Rights agenda publicly through its performances and amongst its membership and the gay community through its social and musical activities. The Choir exists to support the gay community through making music and our essential purpose is to work to ensure that gays and lesbians have the same rights as all Australians.

The issue of same sex marriage is important for many members of the choir because the knowledge that not all Australian citizens are able to enjoy the privilege of living in an equal society where loving a member of the same sex and getting married is against the law.

Despite recent legislative changes that ensure taxation equality, the benefits of marital status continue to be denied to same-sex partners. Same-sex partners are not equal under the law if they cannot marry and the *Marriage Act* continues to enshrine and foster discrimination against same-sex partners as long as it prohibits same-sex marriage. Married partners have immediate access to all relationship rights, entitlements, protections and responsibilities. In contrast, de facto couples must cohabit for a certain period before they have any rights and protections.

We have extended our community singing outreach and regularly perform at people's commitment ceremonies, supporting them as they commit to each other publicly despite such ceremonies' lesser status in the eye of the law. We are deeply aware that the commitment ceremony is 'second best', even more so now that it comes with all the financial and legal obligations of the state of marriage that we are denied.

We were heartened by the June 2009 vote of the Australian Senate to hold an inquiry into the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009*. The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir strongly supports this Bill and urges the Senate to amend the federal *Marriage Act* so that same-sex partners are able to marry in Australia, and to recognise same-sex marriages legally

entered into overseas.