

Inquiry into the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009*
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,
Parliament of Australia

Submission from the NSW Council of Churches

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1. The NSW Council of Churches, representing seven evangelical Christian denominations in NSW,¹ welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the current Inquiry. In accordance with unequivocal biblical teaching and longstanding Christian belief and practice, the NSW Council of Churches affirms the belief that marriage is a social institution ordained by God as an intimate and permanent partnership between one man and one woman in which the two persons become “one flesh” in the whole of their lives. The ideal is an active lifelong monogamous heterosexual relationship shared by the couple. The *Marriage Act 1961* upholds such a view of marriage.
2. Key biblical texts which undergird the understanding of the meaning and significance of marriage held by member churches of the NSW Council of Churches include Genesis 1:26-28; 2:21-24; Matthew 19:6; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40; 13:1-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; Hebrews 13:4; and 1 Peter 3:1-7. The biblical witness does not envisage the possibility of same-sex marriage and, together with the established tradition of the evangelical churches and many other churches for two thousand years, clearly precludes couples of the same sex or the same gender identity from entering into marriage.
3. The NSW Council of Churches strongly opposes moves by the Australian Greens and others, in particular the private senator’s bill introduced by Senator Hanson-Young and referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee on 25 June 2009, to remove all discrimination from the *Marriage Act 1961* on the basis of sexuality and gender identity. The NSW Council of Churches encourages all those who solemnize marriages in Australia, in particular ministers of religion, to take careful regard of the sex, sexuality and gender identity of persons intending to marry, and to ensure, to the extent that they are able, that marriages are solemnized on the basis of the *Marriage Act 1961* as it currently stands.

¹ Anglican Church (Diocese of Sydney), Baptist Union of NSW, Christian Reformed Church, Churches of Christ, Fellowship of Congregational Churches, Presbyterian Church, The Salvation Army.

4. The NSW Council of Churches rejects the view that legislation defining marriage as exclusively between one man and one woman denies the human rights of same-sex couples, and holds that the acceptance and celebration of diversity within marriage is best achieved by the presence of a male and a female partner in a marriage relationship and not by removing all references to sexuality and gender identity from marriage legislation.
5. The NSW Council of Churches is of the view that the most appropriate context for the bearing and raising of children is a stable relationship between one man and one woman who are married to each other and who are the biological or adoptive parents of the child or children. The collective wisdom of many generations and cultures, together with the sacred writings of the world's religions, in particular the Christian faith and the Christian Scriptures, provide a strong foundation for this view. There is significant empirical and anecdotal evidence to indicate that heterosexual couples provide a better environment for a child's emotional, psychological, intellectual and social development.
6. The NSW Council of Churches believes that there is empirical evidence that many same-sex couples experience a degree of emotional and sexual instability not found in the general population and this raises questions as to their suitability as parents. Same-sex parenting is not "just another healthy alternative" to traditional parenting. A child's best interest is not served merely by having parents but by feeling secure and possessing wellbeing. A child requires positive male and female role models over a period of years in order to fully actualize their personal potential, develop their sexuality and gender identity, and prepare them for parenting the next generation.
7. The NSW Council of Churches believes that the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009* weakens the meaning and significance of marriage and therefore intentionally discriminates against heterosexual couples and religious organisations which affirm traditional beliefs and practices with regard to marriage and which would be unwilling to act contrary to their religious convictions.
8. The NSW Council of Churches is of the view that Christian churches should not cooperate with the state in sanctioning or celebrating same-sex marriages, and strongly discourages Christian ministers of religion from solemnize same-sex marriages in Australia. The Council takes this view on the basis that such actions would contravene biblical teaching and evangelical Christian doctrine.
9. The NSW Council of Churches affirms the human right to religious liberty with respect to the practices of member churches in the solemnizing of marriages; and asserts that individuals, churches and church agencies possess the right to provide and have access to goods and services in accordance with their religious beliefs.

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