

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

Submission from the Baptist Union of NSW

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1. The Baptist Union of NSW, representing the Baptist Churches of NSW and the ACT, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the current Inquiry. In accordance with unequivocal biblical teaching and longstanding Baptist belief and practice, the Baptist Union of NSW 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 and is, in the opinion of the Baptist Union of NSW, sufficient for the proper order of Australian society, for Baptist church life with respect to the solemnizing of marriages, and for the promotion of the common good of all Australians.
2. Key biblical texts from which Baptists have developed their understanding of the meaning and significance of marriage 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.
3. In the light of this biblical witness, the Baptist Union of NSW affirms the Declaration of Purpose given in the Baptist Union of Great Britain’s guidebook for worship leaders, titled *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 124, which offers the following form of words for the marriage ceremony:

The Bible says that God has made us in his image, male and female. We are separate and different yet able, in love, to meet, know, and delight in one another. In Christian marriage two people trusting in this mystery of love commit themselves to live faithfully together for life, in plenty or need, joy or sorrow. For this purpose [the man’s name] and [the woman’s name] are here today. They will give themselves to one another so that God’s gift of love may join them together as husband and wife.

These biblical and liturgical witnesses do not envisage the possibility of same-sex marriage. These witnesses, together with the established tradition of the Baptist churches and many other churches for two thousand years, preclude couples of the same sex or the same gender identity from entering into marriage.

4. The Baptist Union of NSW 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 Baptist Union of NSW expects all those who solemnize marriages in Australia 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.
5. The Baptist Union of NSW rejects the view that legislation defining marriage as exclusively between one man and one woman denies the human rights of same-sex couples. Further, the Baptist Union of NSW is of the view 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.
6. The Baptist Union of NSW 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.
7. The Baptist Union of NSW 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.
8. The Baptist Union of NSW opposes the legalisation of same-sex marriage and opposes legislative and policy measures designed to legalise same-sex marriage by stealth.
9. The Baptist Union of NSW 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.
10. The Baptist Union of NSW does not permit its accredited or recognised ministers to solemnize same-sex marriages as official celebrants acting in accordance with the rites of the Baptist Union of Australia. Nor will the Baptist Union of NSW change its by-laws or policies to accommodate changes to federal or state legislation which contravene biblical teaching or Baptist doctrine. The Baptist Union of NSW makes this declaration on the basis of the human right to religious liberty and on the basis of the principle 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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on behalf of the Baptist Union of NSW
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