

Gay Marriage!



My name is Samantha Marriner and this is my submission to eliminate the discrimination from the Marriage Act 1961 and the reverse the amendments made in 2004.

In Australia, we have adopted many different nations, cultures and people as our peers. We have allowed Muslim women to wear their headdresses in licence photos; however, Australians must remove their hats before the photo is taken. We have allowed many different cultures in, many not having a basic understanding of the Australian language, yet there are many English-speaking Australians out of work because jobs now seek second languages as a requirement of applying for the job. We have adopted different cultures into our own without discriminating the dress, the language, the religion or the person. We allow 70 year old men to marry their gold digging 24-year-old girlfriends, but we do not allow men and women to marry someone of that same sex. Why?

Above is a picture of a poster that I recently seen in Centrelink and I was dumbfounded. Two of the same picture side by side of a typical bathroom. Two toothbrushes in a glass and a tube of toothpaste sitting on the bathroom countertop. One with gay written underneath and the other with straight. Now I wasn't dumbfounded at the poster. I was dumbfounded at the idea of Centrelink recognizing gay couples and giving them the same rights as straight couples had. I didn't know what to make of it so I went home and

did further research of the issue.

The Centrelink website read: "The Australian Government has introduced wide-ranging reforms that recognise all couples, regardless of the sexual orientation or gender of a partner. The reforms also recognises children living in same-sex families." I thought this was great. Finally the Australian government was beginning to realise what was actually going on in Australia and recognising it. We've accepted so many different people and cultures into our country, why not accept gays and lesbians. But then I read on some more: "From 1 July 2009 changes to legislation will mean that customers who are in a same-sex de facto relationship will be recognised as partnered for Centrelink and Family Assistance Office purposes. All customers who are assessed as being a member of a couple will have their rate of payment calculated in the same way." This annoyed me. This basically meant that the Australian Government had recognised that there were gay and lesbian couples out there who had families and were living their lives like a "traditional" couple, but that they were each getting paid a single rate of payment because their relationship was not recognised by Australian government laws. In other words, these changes only came about so the government would save money. How is that recognition if it just means cheaper rates?

There was a link below it that was titled "Other government changes". I was interested to see what else they had thought of so I read on. "The commitment to removing the discrimination that currently applies to members of same-sex couples and their children will also apply to other areas of the Australian Government, including taxation, superannuation, the pharmaceutical benefits scheme safety net, the Medicare safety net, aged care, child support, veteran's affairs, immigration and citizenship. For more information about other Government changes related to same-sex reform, view the same sex law reforms section on the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department website." That's exactly where I went.

The list is endless for new entitlements. Some of the good ones are the simple recognition of relationships and families, same-sex couples receiving access to the same tax concessions as married and de-facto opposite sex couples, making same-sex couples and their children eligible to receive superannuation death benefits, allowing same-sex families to access the Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme safety nets as a recognised family, in regards to aged care same-sex couples will be treated in the same

way as opposite-sex couples so a member of a same-sex couple will be taken to have 50% of the total value of the couple's income and assets, same sex couples are eligible to apply for child support, same-sex couples and their children will be 'members of the family unit' for visa purposes when it come to migration, in the same way that spouses and opposite-sex de facto partners and their children are currently included as members of the family unit and same-sex couples are able to apply for the same partnered visa as opposite-sex couples, same-sex couples have the same rights as opposite-sex couples when it comes to recognising citizenship and the changes in relation to veterans' affairs allow same-sex couples to access certain entitlements from which they were previously precluded.

This all sounds really good but then you look into it a little more or simply read between the lines, it is all about money. Being recognised as a couple to Centrelink means partnered payments, whether it be Newstart allowance, family tax benefit, parenting payments or job assistance payments, if you were declared as a single person and now declare as a couple, you receive a partnered payment at the reduced partnered rate. The reforms also mean that some members of same-sex couples who first enter permanent residential aged care on or after 1 July 2009 may pay a higher accommodation bond or charge.

This is great for same-sex couples that they are actually being recognised under the Australian Government but who wants recognition when it has only come down the basis of money. Recognition should be given, as the Australian Government website states, through being "entitled to respect, dignity and the opportunity to participate in society and receive the protection of the law regardless of their sexuality" not because they get out of it cheaper.

Now, the Government openly admits on the website that "as a result of ensuring that same-sex couples receive the same treatment as opposite-sex de facto couples, the reforms may also impose burdens on some same-sex couples or reduce certain benefits they currently receive. It is the Government's view that these reforms are necessary and an essential step towards a fairer and more just society." If they want a fairer and more just society, they have taken a good and very big step in making that happen but why is marriage such a big deal to people?

Let me ask you this. If I proposed to my girlfriend tomorrow over a beautiful sunset, a

candlelit dinner on a truly romantic evening, how does that affect you? If I hire a wedding planner, a caterer and a designer, how does that affect you? If I have my wedding in the quiet garden of a function centre with only select family and friends by our side or in the biggest, fanciest function centre available with hundreds of guests, how does that affect you? If I marry my girlfriend, if I commit the rest of my life to her, how does that affect you? How does me reciting “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, to be faithful to you until death do us part” to my girlfriend affect you?

There is no answer you could give me that would justify why I shouldn't do any of those things tomorrow. No answer, no excuse, no fancy big worded explanation could give me a good enough reason for us not to marry. If you are allowed to do all this stuff as a man to your girlfriend or a woman to your boyfriend without affecting anyone else, why cant we? If we married tomorrow, you would still wake up, you would still go to work, you would still have your kids, your family and your partner, you would still have your life, you would still have your job and you would still have everything you did yesterday. We would have each other. We would have a loving commitment, a simple wish and an exciting future to look forward to with our beautiful partners and, as I've heard some say “a piece of paper”.

If it is just a piece of paper, why is it such a big deal for us to have one with our names on it and recognition of our love?