

E. Hughes

25 August 2009

Re: Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009

We are a couple in our mid-30s. We have been together for six years and have a two-year old daughter. On the surface we are just like all the other young families out here in the suburbs of Melbourne: we have a mortgage, we have pets, we moan about the price of petrol and the state of public transport and we celebrate birthdays and milestones with family and friends. Scratch the surface and underneath we are still just like all the other young families: we share a sense of humour, we show each other how much we care with gestures big and small, we argue and we make up, we are committed to each other for life, we are in love. The only thing that makes us different is being the same sex as each other. We can't understand the logic that stops us from taking that next big step of getting married and celebrating for all the world to see.

This is blatant discrimination. In a country supposedly enamoured of the "fair go", we don't get a fair go at marriage. Yes, last year the Federal government changed a raft of laws to acknowledge us as couples. So now we're good enough to pay taxes as a couple, good enough to be treated as a couple for welfare but not good enough for marriage? The government need not pat itself on the back for too long... It's not true equality.

When we talk about this issue we start to feel like toddlers ourselves, asking over and over, "*But why?*". Why can't we get married? Because the government thinks we shouldn't. *But why?* Because marriage is between a man and a woman. *But why?* No-one seems to be able to answer this question satisfactorily.

Because marriage is for procreation? There are plenty of infertile people allowed to marry, plenty of people with no intention of having children, plenty of people past childbearing age – all of whom are allowed to marry. Meanwhile, we've managed to procreate without being in a heterosexual marriage.

Because God said so? Australia is a secular society, and people's interpretation of the bible should have no influence on our laws. In any case, Ellis was brought up Catholic and the God her family believed in taught love and acceptance, not hatred or intolerance.

Because that's the way it has always been? Marriage has changed over the centuries. So many traditions have changed over the centuries. Let's not stand in the way of

progress for a modern nation.

Because it will weaken marriage? We fail to see how a committed marriage between two people will have any impact on anyone else's marriage. In fact, with fewer and fewer people choosing to marry these days anyway, surely our marriage would strengthen this institution. It needs all the support it can get.

It seems clear to us that there is no reason to prevent us from getting married other than fear of losing the vote and political support of religious fundamentalists. This is unfair. We are hurt. Our love deserves the same respect and recognition as yours. This is not about votes, this is about equality for all Australians.

Please be aware that preventing us from marrying doesn't just affect us as a couple. This is not a private pain. Our daughter is prevented from having her family recognised in the same way that other kids' families are. Our parents are prevented from celebrating their only daughters' weddings. Our extended families and our friends don't get to enjoy the ceremonial coming together of two tribes united by the strong love of two people. And all of those people are hit with the subtle message that our relationship is not as important or as valid as the relationships of our heterosexual families and friends.

It's a bittersweet coincidence that we are writing this on the date of Eilis' parents' 36th wedding anniversary. They are role models to us for love and commitment in a relationship. We would be proud to be able to celebrate 36 years or more of marriage ourselves.

The offer of civil unions is a furphy. It is offering us something less than other couples. It is making us "less equal". Marriage isn't everyone's cup of tea, but that's really not the point. The point is that we wish to stand before the law and before society as equals.

We urge the Senate to carefully consider whether the continued discrimination against a minority in Australia can be allowed to continue.

Please let us make our own choice about whether we should get married

Eilis Hughes