

I have been in a relationship with my female partner for 31 years. We have three children and two grandchildren. Two of our children are married (the other one is still too young to marry).

When our son got married, we sat at the bridal table as his parents and were in all the photos as ‘mother of the groom’. However, listening to the marriage celebrant state the compulsory declaration that marriage is between a man and a woman voluntarily entered into for life, made us acutely aware that we are still not able to be married in our own country, if we so choose.

My partner has been married before and is not so interested in doing this again. She feels she has “been there, done that, got the t shirt“ (or should that be, got the wedding dress) but understands that I, like thousands of other women and men in same sex relationships, would want to have the choice to marry in Australia.

Everyone who knows us would not for a moment doubt our love and commitment to each other. There is no need for a wedding for this to be publicly acknowledged. However, there are other reasons I feel strongly about the right to marry. We had planned to get married in Canada last year (other reasons forced us to delay travelling overseas). Even though our marriage would not have been recognised once we landed back in Australia, I was driven by the acute desire to just once be somewhere in the world where my relationship is officially recognised as equal to that of opposite sex couples.

The fact that marriage is denied to same sex couples is something that I live with on a daily basis. Every time I fill in a form I am asked for my marital status: single, married, de facto, separated, divorced. None of these categories really fit. I’m not single (other than in the strict ‘not legally married’ sense) and I refuse to use the term ‘de facto’; this is for heterosexual couples who have chosen not to marry or are not yet married (and may choose to do so in the future – the fiancée group). I too would like the choice to be married and have my commitment to my long-term partner officially recognised.

The possible option of a state based register system instead of the right to marriage is not good enough. Registering is for dogs and not loving same sex couples. It should also not depend on which state of Australia you live in as to whether a relationship can be registered. As Egale pointed out during a similar debate in Canada: “Any ‘alternative’ to marriage, in my opinion, simply offers the insult of formal equivalency without the promise of substantive equality”.

I feel that the following words say it all:

“It is essential to remember that the desire for legal recognition of same-sex-unions is not about sex. It is about the State valuing and helping to protect and foster love,

companionship, shared lives, tenderness, laughter, pain and sorrow. It is about the most worthwhile, if not the only worthwhile, attribute humans have – the ability to love another person, to share unselfishly with them. To place the other before oneself. To want the best possible thing for one's partner and to care deeply for them until death." Peter Rigby Taylor & Hans Jurgen Boesewinkel