

## **Equal rights are human rights – equality in marriage.**

Equal rights are fundamental to the moral fabric of today's society. All too often stories of inequality and injustice emanate from cultures that lack the democracy we enjoy in Australia. The prosecution of women who wear trousers in Sudan, the silencing of freedom of speech in China, the imprisonment of those who speak out against a dictatorship in Burma.

And in the not too distant past even the most democratic of twenty-first century countries had laws that restricted the rights of people based on arbitrary prejudices. Interracial marriage in countries such as the USA, and even in our own Australia, was strictly controlled and manipulated by laws and legislation. Who today could imagine a law that would restrict marriage based on the colour of a person's skin?

Marriage provides equality in the eyes of the law. For two people who commit to spend their lives together the law is there to ensure that this institution is protected and the privileges of this shared trust upheld. Thousands in Australia have made this commitment but have no legal standing. There is no formal ceremony in which to cement their commitment and no legal framework to support their lives together. The only reason that these thousands of couples are deprived of this most basic human right is that they have committed themselves to someone of the same sex.

Allowing same-sex couples to marry will only impact on those members of the gay and lesbian communities who wish to take up this fundamental right. For those nay Sayers who argue against marriage based on outdated religious teachings amending the law to allow same-sex marriage will have no real impact. How can the union of an unknown couple have any real bearing on any other individual? Furthermore, no religious argument should be entertained that is used to deny same-sex marriage. Australia is a multicultural country where many religions are practiced. Unlike numerous countries in the Middle East we do not live in a society that allows religious law to dominate. We revel in our acceptance of human rights and it is the right to basic equality that should determine whether or not a couple can marry.

Today in Australia there are many same-sex couples who have flourishing families. Their children are being raised in a culture that will not allow their parents to marry. Do we want a society that is teaching its youth to discriminate based on sexual orientation and that not all humans are equal in the eyes of the law? The intolerance that outdated laws, such as those pertaining to marriage, can breed is detrimental to society and only fuels further discrimination and hatred.

Some will argue that by allowing same-sex unions it undermines the concept of a nuclear family. It is clear that many conventional family units are dysfunctional, however this is not a reason to deny any of these families their rights. In fact much evidence is available to support the strength of same sex families and the positive contributions that they make to society. Therefore is it logical to accept that by allowing same sex marriage heterosexual marriage will suffer as a consequence?

Many surveys over recent years have shown that the majority of the population in Australia support same-sex marriage. It is the very loud voice of a politically powerful (and religious) few that has allowed Australia to maintain its discriminatory practices

in regard to same-sex marriage.

As I write my partner and I are expecting twins. They will be born before the end of this Inquiry. Legally we cannot marry and this will impact on our rights to care for them as equal parents. By allowing us to marry our children will grow up in the security of a relationship that enjoys all the privileges that other married parents have. More importantly they will benefit from being raised in a country that recognises the importance of equality, justice and human rights.

Here we stand at a precipice of moral equality. With courage we can jump the gap that separates same-sex couples from their heterosexual counterparts. The alternative is to condemn Australia to many more years of injustice based on misguided religious ideologies and outdated beliefs. If Australia truly intends to respect human rights then don't allow sexual orientation or gender get in the way of equality for all.

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