

27 August 2009

Dear Senators

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009 in support of marriage equality for same-sex couples.

The Marriage Act should be amended to acknowledge gay and lesbian relationships and recognise the overseas marriages of gay and lesbian couples. Currently gay men and lesbians are permitted to have civil ceremonies, but they are not allowed to be married. Their relationships are acknowledged by Centrelink, Medicare and other government agencies, but the Marriage Act lags behind.

Superannuation law, IVF and many other areas of the law have recently been amended to keep pace with the changing public attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. Workplaces also recognise these relationships and allow gays and lesbians to take leave to care for a partner who is unwell. It is time that the Marriage Act was also changed to reflect widespread community acceptance and show the world that Australia is a modern, liberal country that respects individual differences.

The discrimination written into the Marriage Act has affected me personally. My partner and I celebrated our relationship with a commitment ceremony in 2001. There were over a hundred guests spanning several generations. All of our living grandparents and parents attended, as did nearly everyone else we invited. It was a wonderful celebration, but did not afford us equal rights in the eyes of the law to our heterosexual counterparts.

This year we became the proud parents of twin baby girls, and . It is for their sake that I am making this submission. I want them to grow up in a world where bigotry is outlawed, a world where their alternative family structure is seen as inconsequential.

Modernising the Marriage Act sends a message to bigots that prejudice will no longer be tolerated. It sends a message to gay men and lesbians that they can come out of the closet, that they will be respected for who they are. This is a step towards lowering the youth suicide rate, and a step towards maximising community involvement and unity.

It is time to remove discrimination against same-sex couples in the *Marriage Act*.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Evans