

Daniel Lockwood

27 August 2009

Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Marriage Equality Inquiry
Via e-mail legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senators

Re: Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009

We write to you as a couple who have been together for 11 years this December. For 10 of those years we have lived together, kept our finances in joint names, attended the births, weddings and funerals of our friends and family together, bought our home together and loved and supported each other through the highs and lows that life has thrown our way. It is our absolute intention to stay together for the rest of our lives.

In the last 11 years we have seen Australia take steps both backward and forward on social issues, but perhaps the most baffling, illogical and hurtful to us has been successive governments' refusal to extend equal marriage rights to homosexual Australians. We watch as one nation after another extends this very basic right to all of its citizenry, while gay and lesbian Australians are left further and further behind.

Thus it is extremely sad for us, that at this most significant moment of our shared life together, we are forced to leave our home and country of birth to make the only statement of commitment we deem worthy of our relationship. In a little over five weeks, we will be travelling to Toronto, Canada, to be legally married. It is an exciting time but also bitter-sweet, for among the 102 invited family and friends, only four are able to make the long journey and be there with us. For the remaining 98, they will be left at home feeling disappointed, perplexed and hurt, while being resigned to sharing our special day on YouTube.

The situation of marriage inequality in Australia means that our parents will not see their eldest sons marry, that we must leave our country which we love dearly for one we have never before visited nor have any ties with, and still return to find Australian law remains obstinately deaf to the marriage vows we will have

exchanged in Canada. The inability to have our marriage recognised once solemnized is insulting, hurtful and tells us our relationship is less worthy, simply by virtue of our gender. We feel that the resistance to marriage equality is nothing more than a small section of society seeking to maintain its dominance through perpetuating the inferior status of homosexuals, of keeping them 'in their place', and arguing that a gay admission to the ranks of the married would somehow lower the tone of marriage itself. This is nothing short of prejudice, is deeply offensive to us and our family and friends, and we believe it has no place in modern Australian legislation.

When we have discussed marriage inequality with many of our (heterosexual) family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances, it has often been met first with genuine surprise that we are still denied the right to marry in Australia, then incredulity that the situation persists with the support of a supposedly socially progressive government, and finally anger at an indefensible injustice inflicted upon a minority, and with no demonstrable benefit for the majority. Supportive comments such as "Your relationship is exactly the same as mine" (a 37 year-old married heterosexual male), and a somewhat incredulous "What difference is it going to make to my marriage if you and David get married?" from the same person make us wonder, who exactly is benefiting from our exclusion from the institution of marriage, and how? We think we have a right to know, because it hurts us very deeply, and every day.

While many people are upset when learning of the situation of marriage inequality in Australia, a policy of discrimination also sends a very frightening message to people hostile to homosexuals. Despite living in Sydney, a city known for its tolerance of sexual diversity, we encounter anti-gay attitudes and verbal abuse on a daily basis. We are always hyper-vigilant at night and in unfamiliar areas, fearing we may be identified as gay and subsequently assaulted, or worse. We understand there are laws in place to deter and punish these types of attacks, but the message the laws are designed to send is essentially undermined when the *Marriage Act* determines an inferior status for homosexuals. To the prejudiced and easily-led, the Government's position is that gays and lesbians should be treated differently, thus providing a justification for their abusive behaviour.

As one of the most important and symbolic social institutions, marriage confers the ultimate in relationship recognition. It is for this reason we do not support alternative models of relationship recognition, such as civil unions or partnership registrations, as a substitute for universal marriage. Anything other than marriage would reinforce the perception of same-sex relationships as inferior, hence our decision to travel overseas for a state-sanctioned wedding. We feel for couples in a similar situation to ours, but who are unable to travel overseas through lack of money or other obstacles. For them, there is no option but to fight, wait and hope for the same rights that their straight brothers and sisters can take for granted.

In the interests of achieving a more equitable society, we urge you to support the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009 and recommend it to the Senate.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Lockwood