

Submission to the Inquiry into Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009

Dear Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,

I make this submission in support of the Marriage Amendments Bill 2009 on the grounds that in our secular society the rights of each individual to live their lives in equality with others should be protected wherever possible as long it does not infringe the rights of others or cause harm to any persons concerned.

Same sex couples should have the same rights as other couples in our society if they choose to live in a permanent committed relationship. It is discriminatory to either refuse them such a possibility or to allow them the right to live as they choose within the law.

My experience of working with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people has offered me first hand knowledge. Not surprisingly, I have found them to be like the rest of society. They encompass a wide range of humanity with all manner of backgrounds, skills and abilities. Like heterosexual people, there are those who can live permanent relationships and those who struggle to do so; there are those who are suited to raising children and those who struggle in this.

I believe Australia should be a place where these options are available to all couples without prejudice, especially based solely on a person's sexual orientation or identity. It is appropriate and important to have certain safeguards to ensure children are protected from harm and these should apply equally to all couples as well as those parenting or care-giving as singles.

I am aware that the term "marriage" is difficult for some. I do not have any suggestions on how to deal with this issue. Maybe there could be some form of formal legal couple relationship that has all the rights and responsibilities normally associated with marriage but has a special term to denote that this relationship is between same sex couples. Ultimately this should be a discussion for same sex couples themselves as it is for them that this legislation is being brought and they will live with and make real the outcomes.

Whatever the term used for the recognition of committed same sex couples, it is vitally important that Australian law offers the same status, rights and responsibilities to same sex couples as is offered to heterosexual couples. That ultimately is the justice issue.