

I am a young gay man. I met my current partner more than five years ago and we have been in a relationship since. Some of my friends (straight and gay) are surprised that we have been together for more than 5 years, perhaps because many people are not exposed to long-term gay relationships. Denying same-sex partners the right to marry, in some respect, lends credence to the notion that gay relationships are less meaningful and less substantial than similar relationships shared between two people of the opposite sex. I can't logically understand this. I love my partner and our relationship has grown over the years we have been together. For all that we have together, the law as it stands means that I cannot legally have him as my husband and that the two of us are denied the rights that accompany marriage. Why do we as a nation continue down this path? It is sad that we progress along a path where change is guarded and painfully slow. There are laws that protect us from discrimination in various contexts although we still have a long way to go. Yet, as we make laws that remove discrimination in some respects, the Federal government actively prohibits the removal of discrimination in the context of marriage. I say actively because having lived in Canberra up until last year, I was a resident while the ACT Labor government sought to introduce legislation that would eliminate discrimination in this respect and afford equality to same-sex partners. Their efforts were thwarted by the Federal government. It was painful to note that neither the Liberal nor the Labor Federal government allowed the ACT government, to decide on legislation for the ACT that was progressive.

Civil unions are a distraction from the issue of removing discrimination against same-sex partners in the area of marriage. Civil unions do not confer the same rights as marriage for the two parties engaged in a civil union. Where is the logic in recognizing that same-sex relationships are no different to the relationships shared by opposite-sex partners and then specifically prohibiting same-sex partners from enjoying a right to celebrate, acknowledge and respect that relationship; a right that opposite-sex partners enjoy. As a gay man, a civil union still causes concern and distress with respect to many issues that I wouldn't have to be concerned with if my partner and I were married. For example, if I was suffering from a serious medical condition, I would want my partner to be able to make the necessary decisions. Many friends in same-sex partnerships have discussed the preparation of or have had lawyers prepare legal documents such as power of attorney documents. This process is tiring, emotionally draining and expensive. It would also be unnecessary if only we could marry.

In considering the issue of same-sex marriage and this Bill, I see an opportunity to confer a right unto a group and afford them a benefit already enjoyed by many. Affording same-sex partners the right to marry enables people in loving partnerships to marry. If more people in loving partnerships marry, surely this is a good thing. Furthermore, the granting of that right and our decision to marry makes a world of difference to us. It does not adversely affect anyone else's relationship or any other person.

Recently, the view that a majority of Australian citizens are not against the right of same-sex couples to marry has been publicised. It is exciting to see that after years of witnessing some quarters incite fear on this issue and publicly denigrate same-sex relationships, the tide is turning. In considering this Bill, Australian lawmakers have the power and the opportunity to remove discrimination and afford same-sex partners the right to marry. Please use this power to make positive change.