

Dear Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,

This is my submission to your inquiry into marriage equality. I am fully in favour of passing the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009.

Same-sex couples in Australia work hard, abide by the law and pay taxes which support the Government and other Australians, and yet are not granted the same rights as other Australians under law. This situation is unjust and completely unacceptable, people in same-sex relationships deserve exactly the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts. Same-sex relationships do not impinge upon the rights of heterosexual people, yet discrimination against same-sex attracted people leads to increased in suicide rates, particularly with regard to youth suicide, mental health problems and other less easily quantifiable forms of suffering. By making it more difficult for same-sex attracted people to live every day, to have security for themselves and their families and to contribute to Australian society to their full potential, discrimination against same-sex attracted people has a negative effect on the whole community.

In this vein it becomes clear that a civil unions or 'different name, equal rights' approach to the same-sex marriage issue is not acceptable. This issue is not simply about legal rights, it is about ending discrimination against same-sex attracted people and achieving equality with the broader Australian community. Allowing same-sex attracted people an equal-rights substitute for marriage is unacceptable in that it still clearly depicts their unions as second-rate to the marriage privileges that heterosexual people enjoy. If religious institutions do not want same-sex couples to be married under their denomination then it is the responsibility of those religious institutions to prohibit it, and not that of the Australian Government. Marriage exists as a non-religious, civil institution for heterosexual people under Australian law and to end discrimination against same-sex people the Government must stand up to religious pressure and grant same-sex people the real, tangible equality that they deserve in giving them full marriage rights. Granting same-sex people the right to marry is crucial in ending discrimination, and here and now Parliament has an opportunity to stand up for the Australian ideals of justice, equality and a fair go for all and grant same-sex attracted people the rights they should be entitled to under law.

Same-sex attracted people make a huge contribution to Australian life, and deserve the respect and support of their communities. If the Federal Government is serious about addressing discrimination against same-sex attracted people it must pass the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill. This is a real opportunity for Australia to demonstrate to the world that it does value justice and equality, and I hope that when considering this bill Members of Parliament take a long, hard look into their hearts and see what they must see; that in order to best serve the communities that elected them, that in order to stand up and defend these ideas of fairness and equality that Australia professes to hold the closest, the only just course of action with regard to the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill is to act in the interests of not only same-sex attracted people, but of all Australians and to pass it.

Please, consider our rights, and our futures.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Hart.