

Dear Senator Crossin,

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.

I am not alone. You are not alone. We are not alone!

All of my life, I felt "different" and nearly 15 years ago I realised, that my "difference" was that I was attracted to other people of the same sex. I was alone. I spent many months agonising about whether I was wrong or perhaps even broken and then whether to tell anyone. Some years after I first realised I was "different" I learnt that I was "gay" and there were other people just like me. Although I cannot tell you which date I found out, I vividly remember what it meant to me – **I was not alone. I am not alone.**

Over the following years, I told my friends of my "difference" and eventually I told my family. Some of my friends told me that they knew already, two or three of my very closest friends even turned out to be gay themselves. My family were very supportive and I spent a great deal of time getting to know myself.

My family are predominantly Christians and I consider myself to be a Christian. I was taught to love and accept those who are different, that all people are equal. I came up against some devastating moments while getting to know myself – I realised that some of those who preached acceptance and equality don't actually want to extend that acceptance and equality to me and those like me and that this attitude was and is being passed on from generation to generation. Unfortunately, it seemed to me that our society was not only allowing but encouraging the continued discrimination of those who are different, like me.

On Friday 13 August 2004, The Australian Labor Party joined with the then Howard Coalition government to pass the Marriage Amendment Bill through the Senate. The passing of the Bill introduced a piece of federal legislation that discriminates against gay and lesbian Australians, by denying them the ability to marry in Australia and denying recognition of their marriages solemnised in countries, outside of Australia, which allow same-sex marriages.

On Friday 13 August 2004, **I felt alone** for the first time since finding out that there were other people just like me. I felt that my government, a government elected by me and my peers had abandoned me and those who are "different", just like me.

From what I can see, there are three key arguments which the movement against same-sex marriage use; those are family, nature and religion.

In regards to family, some believe gay marriage weakens families. However, foster parenting organisations around Australia, even some of the religious-based organisations, have said that same-sex parents offer homes which are as good if not better than many heterosexual parents. The NSW Foster Care Association president Mary Jane Beach has said that same-sex couples are able to provide emotionally stable and financially secure home environments, at a time when financial concerns mean fewer "traditional families" are willing to take on foster children.

In regards to nature, a study called "Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity" by Bruce Bagemihl has shown that homosexual behaviour in the animal kingdom, has been observed in close to 1,500 species and is well documented for more than 500 of them. Animal sexual behaviour takes many different forms, even within the same species. According to Bagemihl, "the animal kingdom has much greater sexual diversity -- including homosexual, bisexual and non-reproductive sex -- than the scientific community and society at large have previously been willing to accept".

Around the world, in independent populations, researchers have found a substantially consistent percentage to be same-sex oriented (one in ten). Over time, homosexuals have been among those who have had the most profound impact on humanity from Socrates and Alexander the Great to Shakespeare. I would encourage you to remember that the next time you read or see Romeo and Juliet or use the Socratic Method. Opposing equal rights for homosexuality based on nature is like opposing the wind or the sun. You can put up walls but you would be better off putting up wind turbines and solar panels!

And in regards to religion, I will not bore you with mistranslations or discrepancies of the Bible, they have been well documented and are available from hundreds of sources, a

short Google search will allow you to read more on this subject. However, there are a few passages which warrant a moment of your time; the Bible says that to touch pig skin makes one unclean, that a father may sell his daughter into slavery and that a person should be put to death for working on the Sabbath (Sabbath is literally translated as "Saturday"). Next time you're watching football on a Sunday, ask yourself if on moral grounds, you should be supporting people who touch pig skin (Leviticus 11:8). If you're someone's daughter, next time you think to oppose homosexuals based on religion, please, ask yourself, "what would a fair price for me be?" (Exodus 21:7). If you answer a work-related email on your Blackberry or iPhone on the Sabbath, ask yourself if law enforcement officials should be legally obligated to stone you to death (Leviticus 23:3).

With all respect to my mother and father, who I love very much, over my short 25 years of life they have, between them, put six signatures on four separate marriage certificates, twice to each other. My family, like every other family I know, has its problems, we fight with each other, we love each other and then we fight with each other all over again. Considering the relative complexity of my family, we have a fairly functional and have a "normal" relationship with each other.

If everything that was said during the debate against same-sex marriage is true and marriage is a religious institution, why were they allowed to get divorced? And why are they allowed to get married a second, third and fourth time?

I believe it is because marriage in the way that we legally recognise it in this country is no longer an institution of the church, it has become an institution of the Federal government, of the law which a church or other religious organisation can choose or in some cases choose not to recognise.

It seems that religious organisations say that marriage is an institution of the church and not law; however they have spent countless time and money petitioning the state and federal Governments to alter the Marriage Act to ensure specific exclusions for same-sex marriage and now continue to spend countless time and money seeking to ensure that the law continues to recognise marriage as an institution of the law rather than an institution of the church. And if marriage is an institution of the church and should be protected, which church? Should Jewish people be allowed to marry if we are a Christian society? Should Muslims, Buddhists, Russian Orthodox or Greek Orthodox? What about atheists, people who do not subscribe to a specific religion?

Discrimination is deadly. On 13 February 2008, a 15 year old in California USA, Lawrence King, was shot twice in the head as he sat in his middle school classroom. He was killed by a 14 year old boy. According to students, he had recently asked the classmate that shot him to be his valentine. This heinous crime was committed by a young boy, who could have only formed his discriminator opinion from his elders; elders such as you, the Australian Senate.

To those of you in the Senate who intend to vote against the same-sex marriage bill, I ask you to see discrimination for what it is; "unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice", a prejudice that we will pass down through generations. I implore you to speak out. I implore you to change your vote. You may be among an elite few in your courage, but **you are not alone** in your thinking, others will be with you when you stand on the correct side of history!

I believe the Marriage Act should be amended to ensure same-sex couples have equal rights to marry in Australia. I believe section 88EA of the Marriage Act should be repealed so that overseas same-sex marriages are recognised in Australia in the same way as opposite-sex marriages between consenting adults.

It is time to ensure that discrimination against same-sex couples in the Marriage Act is removed.

Kindest Regards,

James Fiander