

10 August 2009

To the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee re **Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009.**

About Pete and _____, the happily 'married' couple ...

I have been with my partner, _____, for 16 years. On our 10th anniversary we had a ceremony to celebrate our relationship in a vineyard owned and operated by dear friends of ours. Seventy friends and family (ranging from four years of age up to ninety) gathered in Orange to hear us publicly declare our love and commitment to each other. It was, as "weddings" are supposed to be, a wonderful and memorable day, with many commenting that it was the "best wedding they'd been to". (I initially had no intention of calling it a wedding, but as everyone always referred to it as such I have changed my mind.) I have no doubt that holding this celebration helped forge a stronger and deeper relationship between _____ and I, which, after all, is what making public vows is all about.

There is no-one who is threatened or harmed by our relationship: I do not understand how my loving and caring and being responsible for another man can possibly damage the institution of marriage. Isn't marriage about the sanctity of a relationship, the decision to put that person first, to honour them and say to the world "Look how much I love this person, look at what we can achieve together"?

_____ and I act as a model to others of how a long-term relationship can work. In particular, I know we act as a model to young gay men and women, members of our society who are sorely lacking societal, cultural and economic models for their lives and loves, who are much more risk of violence, hate-crime and suicide than the general population. When I first meet young people (gay or straight), one of the first questions I will be asked is "How long have you and _____ been together?" It's like they are hoping (but not expecting) that two men can have a successful "marriage". There is always a "Wow ..." response to my reply: to me this says a lot about our culture discouraging the celebration of successful gay relationships and encouraging the belief that gay men are only into partying and sex.

So as much as our family and friends celebrated our relationship at the vineyard and were witnesses to our commitment, the Australian government still refuses to acknowledge that commitment and everything it means: providing emotional, physical, financial, intellectual and spiritual support to each other through good times and bad, through sickness and health.

Isn't this something to be celebrated, that we are prepared to publicly declare that we will be there for each other for the rest of our lives?

I voted for the ALP at the general election in 2007 in hope and expectation: for the future, for our country, for Australia's international reputation and, as an individual in a gay relationship, that FINALLY, gay and lesbian couples would be recognised as equal to all other relationships.

Now, following the ALP Conference and, in particular, Kevin Rudd's stance on Marriage (In)Equality I realise that, no, the ALP do not rule for everyone and that hope has died. For the first time since the general election, I feel disenchanting with the government and *disenfranchised*. What makes it worse is that I know that this decision to maintain the status quo was governed by fear: fear of the unknown ("I don't know any gays"); fear of disobeying religion ("God doesn't like gays"); fear of disobeying one's superiors ("Kevin doesn't like it so I better tow the party line"); fear of the electorate ("Voters don't like it so I might lose my marginal seat").

WAKE UP!!! The Australian general public are ahead of you on this and are happy to grant us equal rights. You are holding Australia to another internationally embarrassing position by falling behind other countries.

The government has made gay couples legitimate economic units for taxation and social services: now it's time to balance the ledger and give us equal relationship status. You want our money? Give us our rights.

I do not believe that creating state-based civil union registers for non-heterosexual relationships is the answer. We are all humans with the same impulses and emotional and physical needs; why should our rights vary from state to state within Australia?

GIVE MEANING TO A "FAIR GO":

GRANT MARRIAGE RIGHTS TO ALL AND SEND A MESSAGE

TO AUSTRALIA'S GAY YOUTH THAT **EVERYONE** IS EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW!