Submission by:
Kirstin Hanks

Dear Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,

RE: Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009

I firmly believe in the modern ideal of marriage as a loving commitment between two individuals. I believe that the "Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009" strengthens this ideal, and will not only remove unfair discrimination against same-sex couples but be a positive influence on all marriages and on society as a whole.

Personally I think same sex marriage is an issue which should be decided based on who it affects most. If the couple deeply wish to make a life-long commitment to each other and be legally married, they should not be denied this just because some people feel vaguely and transiently uncomfortable about it.

As someone currently in a de facto heterosexual relationship, I do not understand how people think that same-sex couples being able to marry would weaken the concept of marriage, but I do feel that the concept of a loving marriage is weakened by excluding some loving couples from it. I feel deeply uncomfortable with the current situation in which I would not be able to marry my partner if he was a different gender.

Marriage is a changing and evolving concept. Previously it was an agreement between two families and the bride and groom may have had very little say in their choice of partner – this is an idea of marriage that still persists in some cultures – but, in modern Australian culture, marriage is a loving commitment between two individuals. I feel that extending the institution of marriage to same-sex-couples is a natural extension of the concept of marrying for love.

I can see no foreseeable harm to our culture if same sex couples are allowed to marry, and it is possible that there may even be some benefits. There is no plausible way in which allowing same sex marriages could hurt society at large, and there are some ways in which society at large could benefit from a more inclusive view of marriage.

Some people will use the idea that marriage is for raising children as an argument against gay marriage. But does this mean infertile people should not be allowed to marry at all? Plenty of couples have a loving relationship with each other and do not feel the need for children, and plenty of couple successfully raise their non-biological children, or raise step children from a previous marriage. There is already a lot of variety in families and marriages. The biggest problem which children of same-sex couples would have would

be social exclusion, and a fully-recognised marriage between same-sex-parents would help to reduce this social exclusion for their children. There is no feasible and ethical way for a government to prevent people from having children, so why not let them raise them as a married couple.

I believe that to a certain extent some problems in society can be traced to out-dated views of gender roles. Though I do not like to stereotype women as victims, it seems that more women than men are the victims of domestic abuse (violent, sexual, and emotional). At least some of this disparity is probably due to the outdated view that a husband is allowed to control his wife.

I think we need to look to the future and not the past. I do not think strict gender roles help individuals in our society reach their maximal potential.

Sincerely,
K R Hanks