

Marriage equality Senate Committee Submission.

16/7/09

It is exactly 20 years ago today that I met my same sex partner. We are about to tour Europe for a month as part of our anniversary celebrations.

Although we are successful professionals we have always had a feeling in the back of our minds that we are seen as second class citizens when it comes to being recognised by our own government, peers and community. It is hard to put in plain words how this subtle feeling affects you in your day to day life in the way you act in the world. We pay taxes to support schools, teachers and society but we are constantly reminded that we are not equal full stop.

After 20 years with my partner, simple innocent questions such as “what does your wife do?” still makes me feel uneasy even after all this time due the deep rooted feelings in the back of my mind of the “second class label” that has been reinforced in all aspects of life.

We are not saying that every same sex couple wants or even supports marriage in the traditional way but the very fact that it is discriminatory and banned in law sets an attitude that pervades throughout all aspects of society.

When we emigrated here several years ago, the discrimination began even before we set foot in the country as my long term partner was not recognised until I had “paid” the fee to become a resident myself. It was only then that my partner was allowed to apply and pay the expensive application fee all over again, while at the same time we saw our straight friends just show their marriage certificate and be welcomed in without any “relationship check”. Can you imagine what it feels like without any legal recognition to be asked like children to prove our relationship?, ie proving we have been on holiday together by showing personal photos, showing bills in joint names and letters to prove we are a couple.

We are not arguing that Churches should be forced to perform same sex marriages, but the law should not be involved in specifically outlawing them or discriminating against legal overseas marriages.

When the Howard Government went out of its way and spent valuable parliamentary time specifically to discriminate against a small minority of Australians and overseas legal same sex marriages and unions it sent a very strong message to all Australians that discrimination was valid even at the highest level. This was very pertinent and disturbing to young people trying to come to terms with their own sexuality.

I do find it surprising that the very Australians against equality (who are straight) are the

very people who are not impacted at all by supporting these discriminatory laws. These archaic arguments have been used before e.g the vote for african Americans, the vote for women and allowing mixed race marriages decades ago. Society was strengthened by these changes not weakened.

Australia is a secular society with freedom of expression. Marriage is the legal recognition of a relationship between two people by Government and society. Anything that encourages a family unit is beneficial to society at many levels including economically, mentally and health wise.

It is a red herring from religious groups that marriage is purely their domain.

1. Straight couples can marry on a beach with a celebrant. If we take the religious argument literally then all non religious straight marriages both here and overseas should be void. In Australia marriage is a legal process first and foremost as described under Australian Law. Religion is always an optional add on.
2. There are churches in Australia today that would marry same sex couples, but the law specifically stops them from doing so.

In conclusion Love is Love and every Australian should have exactly the same human rights, legal rights , respect and recognition under the law. This is another step for Australia maturing and coming of age.

Regards,

From a couple of forty something's who have just celebrated 20 years together.

Love is Love.

Sydney, Australia