

First name: Kathy

Last name: Wright

Do you wish for your name to be withheld from publication?: No

Do you wish for this submission to be confidential?: No

Your submission:

I write to express my support for the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009.

My partner and I join with many other Australians in respectfully demanding equal civil rights, and in particular the right to marry the person that I love and intend to spend the rest of my life with.

Currently (and only recently) my partner and I can get 'registered' here in Victoria. And while this is a welcome improvement that can assist in providing some legal protections for our relationship, it is also demeaning in comparison with the marriage rights of almost all other Australians.

I can apply for a driver's licence; I can register my dogs with the council. These are administrative processes. However, my relationship with my soulmate and lifelong partner is NOT merely an administrative matter! To treat it as such is frankly insulting, and can only be described as discriminatory.

I work for the Federal Government, and am open about my sexuality and my partner. Most of my colleagues have met my beautiful partner, and we have been accepted by all. In many ways we are treated just the same as the many heterosexual couples, however WE are not permitted to celebrate our love and commitment the way that they can. It becomes hard to continue to attend and support the (seemingly endless) engagement functions and weddings that occur, when we know that our love, happiness and joyful plans for our future together are not given equal recognition.

Interestingly most people remain unaware of the level of discrimination and issues still faced by homosexual couples, and are horrified by it when told of the ongoing battles we face. When I discuss marriage rights with my colleagues, they are all in total support of our right to marry if we wish.

And opinion poll after opinion poll shows that overwhelmingly Australians do support the right of gay people to marry the person they love. It is time for the Government to catch up to the people on this issue. And indeed regardless of either public or private opinion, providing equal access to marriage to gay people is the right thing to do, and can only benefit and strengthen our society.

Marriage is a civil institution in this secular country. The (incidentally quite wrong) religious beliefs of a minority should not be permitted to interfere with and take away rights from another minority.

My marriage to my partner would in no way negatively impact on anyone else. It can do no harm to anyone else's marriage. How could it? Allowing gay people to marry the person that they love will not suddenly cause heterosexual people to cease getting married; will not invalidate the marriage of any heterosexual couple; will not do anything to any heterosexual people whatsoever, except to allow them to live in a better society that no longer treats some of its citizens as being less than others.

I can express this no better than did the Prime Minister of Spain when introducing the same-sex marriage bill there in 2005:

"We are not legislating, honourable members, for people far away and not known by us. We are enlarging the opportunity for happiness to our neighbours, our co-workers, our friends and our families: at the same time we are making a more decent society, because a decent society is one that does not humiliate its members.

In the poem 'The Family' our (gay) poet Luis Cernuda was sorry because "how does man live in denial in vain by giving rules that prohibit and condemn?"

Today, the Spanish society answers to a group of people who, during many years have been humiliated, whose rights have been ignored, whose dignity has been offended, their identity denied, and their liberty suppressed. Today the Spanish society grants them the respect they deserve, recognizes their rights, restores their dignity, affirms their identity, and restores their liberty.

It is true they are only a minority, but their triumph is everyone's triumph. It is also the triumph of those who oppose this law, even though they do not know this yet: because it is the triumph of Liberty. Their victory makes all of us (even those who oppose this law) better people, it makes our society better. Honourable members, there is no damage to marriage or to the concept of family in allowing two people of the same sex to get married. To the contrary, what happens is this class of Spanish citizens get the potential to organize their lives with the rights and privileges of marriage and family. There is no danger to the institution of marriage, but precisely the opposite: this law enhances and respects marriage.

Today, conscious that some people and institutions are in profound disagreement with this change in our civil law, I wish to express that, like other reforms to the marriage code that preceded this one, this law will generate no evil, that it's only consequence will be the avoiding of senseless suffering of decent human beings. A society that avoids senseless suffering of decent human beings is a better society.

With the approval of this Bill, our country takes another step in the path of liberty and tolerance that was begun by the democratic change of government. Our children will look back incredulously if we tell them that many years ago, our mothers had less rights than our fathers, or if we tell them that people had to stay married against their will even though they were unable to share their lives. Today we can offer them a beautiful lesson: every right gained, each access to liberty has been the result of struggle and sacrifice of many people who deserve our recognition and our praise.

Today we demonstrate with this Bill that societies can better themselves and can cross barriers and create tolerance by putting a stop to the unhappiness and humiliation of some of our citizens. Today, for many of our countrymen, comes the day predicted by Kavafis (the great Greek gay poet) one century ago:

"Later 'twas said of the most perfect society / someone else, made like me / certainly will come out and act freely." "

You will note that the sky has not fallen in nor has the world ended since gay couples were allowed to marry in Spain. Nor has anything cataclysmic happened since equal rights to marriage were granted in Holland, Belgium, Canada, South Africa, Sweden, Norway, Vermont, Iowa, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Nor have any of the thirty or so other countries that provide civil unions suffered any negative consequence as a result of granting greater equality to its homosexual citizens.

Allowing gay people to marry the person that they love cannot have, and demonstrably has not had, a negative effect on any individuals, Churches, or societies. The effects of same-sex marriage are all positive, and the facts are clear on this. Marriage equality supports individual dignity, provides gay people with the equal right to seek love and happiness, and provides much needed legal protections to gay people and their families. And yes, gay people do have families!

I am sure that this Senate enquiry will receive a huge number of submissions from religious groups and individuals who believe that they have the (literal) God-given right to demand that the Government continue to treat the homosexual citizens of this country as being less equal than the heterosexual majority.

It is the role of the Government to dismiss those calls that are the result only of ingrained bigotry and prejudice, and to act on behalf of those citizens who are currently discriminated against and reduced to being perceived and treated as second-class citizens.

My partner and I are both Australian citizens, we are equal taxpayers, we deserve no less than equal civil rights. We are just people, who love and honour and are committed to each other, and are truly no different to any heterosexual couple.

We should not be forced to leave our country to achieve equal recognition of our love and commitment to each other.

I would be more than happy to appear in person and answer any questions or doubts you may have. Until then, I can but place my trust in you as our elected political representatives, and expect that you will do what is right and act to ensure we have true equality.

Thank you