

19th March 2012

Senate Inquiry into the Greens Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing to express my great concern and alarm over possible changes to the definition of marriage.

In expressing these concerns I want to underline the fact that I am not homophobic or hateful of people who differ with me in their opinions. And also suggest that these labels are totally unhelpful to open and honest debate. It is clearly possible to hold a more nuanced and mature position between the two extremes of being totally for homosexual practice and hating anyone homosexual. Although it is clearly the case that our society has both these extreme groups present within it, there is also a very large central group that does not accept the appropriateness of homosexual marriage but also totally repudiates a position of hate towards those who are regard themselves as homosexual. Recognising this diversity is important if opinions and views of differing groups are to be heard properly.

Concerning a proposed redefinition of marriage I would like to make the following point.

Behind the rhetoric of 'equality for gays' is a profound redefinition of marriage – a redefinition that is being assumed but not debated. That is, currently the media continues to present a position that marriage is purely about cementing in formal structure the love a person has for another. On this basis, it is argued, marriage between two men or women is surely appropriate – as long as they both love each other. And not just appropriate but a matter of human right given that homosexual people are just as capable of love as heterosexual people.

But! Assumed within this position is a new definition of marriage – that marriage is purely formalizing the love a person has for another.

This isn't our current definition of marriage and it hasn't ever been. As far as I know it has never been any societies definition of marriage – at any time in history, in any society in history – even within societies that were liberal in their views towards homosexuality (such as may be argued was the case in later Roman periods).

Marriage in our society and elsewhere has always been the joining in life long monogamous union a man and a woman with the purpose that children might not only be conceived but also born into a secure home. It hasn't even been the case that love was necessary. Just that the man and woman joining were committed to one another for life. This has been the basis of much stability in society and its continued development and growth.

I would urgently plead for a proper debate about the core issue, which is – are we as a society truly committed to changing this definition of marriage? So that marriage now becomes merely the joining in formal union of any people who love each other?

This surely is where the debate must occur.

And if it does I want to ask a number of questions.

Are we determined to define marriage now as only between two people? Why? On what basis will it be two and only two? If we are to define it this way won't that discriminate between people who share true love between three? Or four? Who says the definition should rule out the possibility of a marriage between many more than merely two?

And will we change the definition from life long union? Etc.

My point is simply this, if we are going to debate the issue of homosexual marriage, we must acknowledge that the real issue is the definition of marriage itself – rather than some more ill defined concern about equality. And if the issue is truly about the definition of marriage, let's please have a much more informed debate about definitions. And if we are going to properly debate definitions, we must recognize many other groups within society that will necessarily need to be considered – otherwise we will end up being very narrow in who we give equality to! That is, it will appear to be clearly the case that if we give homosexuals the 'right' to adopt the label of marriage we are endorsing one groups 'rights' without even considering the 'rights' of many other groups within our society. If this issue is about 'rights' then it is very narrowly applied!

The bottom line for me is that we are being very, very simple minded in this whole process. Our community and our politicians are being driven by a highly vocal and politicized group into a decision that is ill considered and ill informed.

And the consequences are far reaching if we get this wrong.

The first and main one is the impact this change will have on children.

They are truly the silent victims of any changes.

If homosexual marriage is legalized then we will necessarily accept this new married couple's 'rights' to have children. But have we properly considered whether a child has the 'right' to both a mother and a father? We will quickly find ourselves with a new 'stolen generation' and potentially open to dreadful repercussions as a new generation of children rise up in decades to come demanding compensation for having had the right to both father and mother denied to them.

The institution of marriage is too important, and the unintended consequences potentially too great, to not have a far more nuanced and enlightened and intellectually considered debate over the core issue – *what really should be the definition of marriage.*

Yours sincerely

Andrew Heard