

# DR RUSSELL O. DATE

M.B.B.S., F.R.A.N.Z.C.P.

April 1, 2012

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

## **Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010**

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010 ("the Bill"). I am making this submission in my capacity as a practising consultant psychiatrist and member of the Australian community. I am solely responsible for its contents.

In my many years of practice as a psychiatrist I have treated a diverse group of people, representing the broad spectrum of contemporary Australian society, a spectrum much more diverse than many are prepared to recognise.

The Bill is especially relevant to two broad groups of people I see; individuals who are pursuing or have undergone gender transition and people with same-sex attraction (and their families). Too often these people are the targets of unrecognised and unacknowledged discrimination and even vilification, which they not infrequently experience first in childhood or adolescence, with significant impact on their health, both physical and mental. This is particularly deleterious to self-esteem, and is associated with the risk of developing serious mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, and tragically sometimes results in suicide. Needless to say this has the potential to have a profound negative impact on their lives and the lives of those around them.

I strongly support any steps that can be taken to remove all discrimination from the Marriage Act 1961 on the basis of sexuality and gender identity and to permit marriage regardless of sex, sexuality and gender identity. Any legislation that can be used to defend or worse encourage discrimination against, and victimisation and stigmatisation of members of the community is not fair or just, causes harm, and has no place in the laws of a modern society.

If the Bill is passed, it would allow same-sex marriages in Australia, but more than this, the Bill would seem to me to possess the potential to communicate to the members of certain minority groups that their relationships are important and are valued sufficiently by lawmakers to be seen as worthy of the same legal recognition as relationships between other adults, and communicate this to the wider community. The Bill would also advance Australia in to the ranks of many other modern democracies, which have already reviewed their discriminatory laws.

By legislative recognition of currently unrecognised relationships, the message would be sent that the lawmakers of this country value diversity. It would also remove tacit approval for those who continue to defend and promote intolerance and bigotry. This has the potential to improve the lives of numerous vulnerable individuals, especially young people confronting issues of identity, and I have no doubt could ultimately result in improved mental health outcomes for many.

Yours faithfully

Russell O Date