

Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Inquiry on the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010

Dear Committee and Senators,

I am making this submission in favour of the proposed bill to amend the marriage act to allow same-sex couples to marry.

Marriage should be about love and respect, not discrimination. Australia is at its best when we value equality over prejudice and fear.

As a writer and director who has represented Australia on the world-stage since 1994 when Priscilla Queen of the Desert first came out I have noticed two major changes that deserve consideration:

1. Australian Society has evolved greatly and is now far more accepting of gay and lesbian Australians and our relationships. This is demonstrated in the way support for marriage equality has increased from 38% in 2004 to 62% today.
2. The world is becoming increasingly confused why Australia, a country that seeks to lead on human rights, is denying such a basic and important right to loving and committed adult couples. This is also becoming harder and harder for public representatives such as myself to explain.

When Priscilla opened almost two decades ago, Australia was starting to be regarded *the* world leader in gay rights. Now – as the hugely successful stage adaptation of the film rolls out globally, I find myself constantly questioned by media as to why we have become a world *lagger*. What went wrong?

On a personal note, I had near-death skiing accident in 2004 and I was told I was going to die and my partner of 20 years wasn't allowed in the back of the ambulance with me because he wasn't considered family. A marriage certificate is not just a piece of paper, it is irrefutable evidence of a recognised and legally protected relationship. This recognition and protection is currently denied to same-sex couples in some of the most vulnerable and critical moments in our lives.

Our country now has an historic opportunity to stop falling behind the growing number of nations embracing marriage equality and to send the message to everyone struggling with their sexuality that all love will be treated equally.

Should you wish me to appear at any of the upcoming hearings scheduled for this inquiry I would gladly participate.

Yours truly,

Stephan Elliott