

Regarding: Senate Inquiry of Same-Sex Marriage

To the members of the Senate,

It is my standpoint that altering the definition of ‘marriage’ is not legal, preferable nor useful. Therefore, I would argue for the definition of ‘marriage’ to remain unaltered for the following reasons:

1. **DISCRIMINATION:** It has been argued by some that to not redefine ‘marriage’ is an act of discrimination against the gay community. However, conversely, the redefinition of ‘marriage’ to suit this minority group would be discriminating against heterosexual couples (the majority population) who are either currently married or intending to be married in the future. Altering the *definition* of ‘marriage’ concurrently alters the *meaning* of ‘marriage’ for those couples who are already legally joined by the marriage institution, thereby discriminating against them. This leads me to my second argument.

2. **INSTITUTION:** ‘Marriage’ is not just a word, it is a *meaningful institution*. In other words, the institution of ‘marriage’ was initiated and, later, defined to incorporate the *purpose* of the social institution. The institution of ‘marriage’ is a purposeful social structure designed and defined to encompass the initiation and context for our most elementary social structure: the *family*. The heterosexual couple are, physically, the only couple-combination who can, by ‘natural and logical’ means, reproduce their own kind. Heterosexual couples are also both defined and proven to be the most effective couple-combination for offspring-rearing. Statistics from countries in Europe that have previously legalised gay marriage and adoption support this argument.

3. **SOCIAL NORMS and DEVIANCE:** Sociologically, the concept of ‘marriage’ as anything other than heterosexual is incomprehensible. Heterosexual ‘coupling’ has always been the *social norm* in every society, and the reason is obvious. If same-sex coupling were a social norm, the society in question would have ceased to exist simply by negative population-growth. This is why there are *social norms*; for the long-term protection and valid propagation of a healthy society. Same-sex coupling can, therefore, be referred to as *invalid* from a sociological standpoint.

4. **UNIQUENESS:** Heterosexual and same-sex couplings are *different in kind*. ‘Marriage’ is a social institution that legally binds a heterosexual couple, validating their status and infusing it with *social meaning*. Keeping the definition of ‘marriage’ as it stands recognises the uniqueness of the heterosexual *kind* of coupling. This does not exclude same-sex coupling, it simply recognises that it is a *different kind of coupling*, and therefore requires a *different legalised social institution*. Changing the definition of ‘marriage’ is not the solution to this dilemma. Perhaps creating a parallel legally-binding social institution for same-sex couples is.

5. **FLOW-ON EFFECT:** It is clear that society is a complex interaction of diverse ‘systems’, and therefore any changes made within a particular ‘system’ will affect

unexpected and often adverse repercussions in its own system as well as other interconnected systems. Changing the definition of 'marriage' may seem like a small thing to many who have not considered the possible implications. However, the altering of the 'meaning' of this social institution will undoubtedly have repercussions spatially and temporally. If this change is approved by the senate, there will be a 'flow-on effect'. That is, there will be implications for 'nation-state-approved' social meanings, the validity of accepted social norms, the influence of minority group activist politics, the further re-defining of legal couplings possibly to include 'multi-couplings' (polygamy), the re-defining of 'family' and other associated kinship relationships, just to name a few. There will undoubtedly be negative outcomes regarding social solidarity in Australia.

6. NON-VALID PROCESS and PUBLIC RHETORIC: It is of some concern that there has been a lack of discourse *integrity* during the 'marriage' debate. Deliberate terminology choices ('discrimination', 'equality', 'homophobic') have highlighted the fact that those engineering the discourse have been working within a framework of personal biases that will not allow arguments of reason. These terms are emotive and highly suggestive (and irrelevant to the argument), which places a person in a 'defensive' position if they are in disagreement with the stated position.

Arguments for the change in definition have included 'keeping up' with other nations that are allowing same-sex 'marriage'. Personally, I believe Australia is 'ahead' of other nations in many aspects of social justice and inclusion. The definition of 'marriage' is not a matter of 'equality', 'inclusion' or 'discrimination'. It is a matter of social solidarity and relational uniqueness. I believe Australia needs to stay 'ahead' of other nations by retaining the uniqueness of heterosexual marriage, and experiment with legally validating other parallel social institutions for same-sex coupling.

Another matter of concern is the 'rigging' of polls and information dissemination by GLBT activist groups aiming to influence the outcome of the senate inquiry. For example, various polls were overseen by these groups that created statistical information that was portrayed as generalisable, but was not. The polls were strategically directed at small groups of people in specific localities that had the potential to produce the best figures to support the argument in question. It was stated that 'more than 60% of the population is in favour of changing the definition of marriage'. This figure is inaccurate regarding the national figures, yet the rhetoric fulfilled its purpose. Those wanting to retain the definition of 'marriage' were posed as being the 'minority', and those who were 'undecided' began to wonder if they should support the (alleged) 'majority' by agreeing to the change in definition. This approach to public discourse is very effective, yet lacks viability and integrity.

CONCLUSION: It is for these reasons, and some which have remained unspoken for lack of time and space, that I urge the senate to reject the proposed amendments regarding the redefining of 'marriage'. I encourage the senate to show integrity in this manner by basing their decision on valid arguments, concern for social solidarity and the recognition of the possible ramifications of deciding otherwise. I would also commend the senate in its duty to represent the concerns of the Australian majority, and not be needlessly influenced by the minority parties and fractional activists which are incessantly 'nipping at your heels' as it were.

Sincerely and in good faith, Ed Heckathorn.