



AUSTRALIAN HUMANISTS

COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN HUMANIST SOCIETIES INC.

A.C.T. Reg. No. A2991

Representing the Humanist Societies of New South Wales, Queensland,
Victoria and Western Australia

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

30 March 2012

Dear Committee Secretary,

Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010

The Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS) is a national voice for secular, Humanist views. Humanists celebrate and welcome diversity so long as the different ways people conduct themselves does no harm to others. A central belief of Humanists is that equality is a human right that must be accorded to all.

1. Humanists support same sex marriage on the grounds of equality. The current Marriage Act discriminates against people of the same sex who desire to demonstrate their love and commitment to each other by marrying.
2. Science has shown that some individuals have natural, homosexual preferences when choosing loving partners. As this knowledge has spread viewing homosexuality as a defective condition in need of treatment has declined.
3. Recent changes in the law have granted homosexual individuals most of the same legal and civil rights as accorded to heterosexual individuals. Marriage equality is an extension of this civilising trend.
4. The decriminalisation of homosexual acts and the bravery of many homosexuals to 'out' themselves, has changed community attitudes and made Australians much more tolerant and accepting of difference.
5. The health and happiness of homosexual Australians and their families will be improved by passing the proposed amendments to the Marriage Act.
6. The Marriage Act is a piece of civil law that ought to apply equally to all adults of marriageable age.
7. Support for the right of homosexual couples to marry is widespread in the community.
8. A number of countries have already expanded the definition of marriage to include same sex couples, without any adverse social consequences. These include Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Norway, Spain and The Netherlands.

Most opposition to the proposed amendment changes comes from people with strong religious convictions. It would be most regressive if Senators are persuaded by this religious minority. The Marriage Act is a civil law that is not controlled by religions, as neither should any legislation enacted in Australian parliaments. When people of a religious group marry they can have a religious ceremony in addition to the Marriage Act documentation. This freedom will not be affected by the proposed changes. Therefore the rights of religious people will be unaffected by the changes, so why should the rights of others be limited?

Societies change. In respect to couple arrangements; the majority of Australian marriages are performed by civil celebrants rather than ministers of religion. Another trend, already recognised in civil laws, is an increasing number of de facto couples. Same sex marriage is another inevitable change. We therefore urge parliamentarian to support the proposed amendments that further diversifies life style options for Australians.

Yours faithfully

Rosslyn Ives, CAHS president

Affiliated with International Humanist and Ethical Union, London

"Humanists try to lead ethical and responsible lives without relying on the supernatural."