

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010*

I wish to make this submission supporting the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010*. I note that the Bill removes references to “husband” “wife” and other related gender titles in order to allow the marriage of any two individuals, without affecting other restrictions such as age requirements which currently apply under the *Marriage Act 1961*.

In 2010 I was married to my husband in a civil ceremony. To be able to make a public commitment in front of our community meant a great deal to us. We were however aware that a number of guests were unable to make the same commitment to their own partners, despite many of them having been in committed relationships for many years, some of them raising children together. The fact that our celebrant was required by law to state that marriage in Australia is between a man and a woman only was painful for us, and despite the well wishes of our gay and lesbian family members and friends, painful also for them.

Religious organisations that are opposed to gay and lesbian couples being allowed to marry often cite support for the nuclear family as the rationale behind this stance. Families in Australia come in many shapes and sizes and gay and lesbian couples have been raising children together for generations. The right to a legally recognised relationship should not be somehow contingent on whether one group of people think your family is the “right” kind of family. It should be available to all loving couples regardless of whether they are straight, gay, fertile or infertile.

The *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill* makes no changes to the sections of the *Marriage Act* which already provide religious organisation with provisions that ensure they are not obligated to marry any couple and may impose additional requirements on couples wishing to be married by a Minister of Religion. As such, religious organisations that are strongly opposed to the marriage of gay and lesbian couples would be within their legal rights to refuse to marry such couples.

All political parties should realise that the choice to marry someone is a deeply personal one which the state should have as little interference in as possible. Allowing gay and lesbian couples to be married in a civil ceremony (or religious ceremony if the relevant religious organisation accepts such marriages) is the only way to ensure that these couples and their families are not discriminated against. Many countries overseas have legislated against discrimination and there is no evidence that marriage as an institution has been adversely affected.

I support the amendments contained in the *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010* and am looking forward to being able to share with my gay and lesbian friends and family their own wedding days, just as they shared mine with me.

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