



Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

2 April 2012

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: SUBMISSION ON THE MARRIAGE EQUALITY AMENDMENT BILL 2010

I strongly support amendments to the *Marriage Act* that will provide legal equality for same-sex couples and remove discrimination against them.

Marriage is one of the most important institutions in our society. It fosters stable, long-term commitments, brings legal protections and has great symbolic significance.

Excluding same-sex couples from having their relationships recognised through marriage is a powerful and harmful message from the Parliament that these relationships are not regarded as equal and are not as valued.

Providing same-sex couples full and equal access to the institution of marriage will strengthen relationships by encouraging commitment. It will encourage more Australians to participate in one of our society's core traditions. It will bring Australia into line with other jurisdictions with shared values and legal traditions, such as Canada. And it will make Australia a fairer and more inclusive nation.

Mindful of the diverse religious traditions within Australia, I support the provisions in the legislation which would allow a celebrant who is a minister of religion to refuse to marry same-sex partners just as celebrants who are ministers of religion can currently refuse to marry partners on the basis of their faith or previous marital status.

Finally, I do not regard civil unions as an adequate substitute for full equality in marriage for same-sex partners. The establishment by government of a new and separate institution for same-sex couples only compounds rather than resolves this issue of inequality.

Yours sincerely

Hon Don Harwin MLC