

Dear Committee Secretary

Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010

I am writing in support of the passage of the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010. I have read the various contributions made to the same sex relationship debate in both the House and the Senate and it seems to me that those who oppose marriage equality fall roughly into five groups.

1) The homophobes.

Our society has progressed sufficiently that few people (at least in the circles in which I move) are overtly or even consciously homophobic. However, it is very clear that there are some parliamentarians and others who believe that to give same sex relationships the status of marriage would somehow "pollute" or undermine the institution of marriage. Those who believe this are homophobic, just as those who cannot stomach mixed race marriages are racist. All I can do is suggest that Committee members read Kristin J. Anderson, *Benign Bigotry: The Psychology of Subtle Prejudice* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) to help them recognise homophobia when they see it.

2) Religious people who believe that God doesn't approve of same sex unions.

The Bill does not require such people to adopt the proposed legislative definition of marriage for the purposes of their religion and its rites. It is, therefore, disingenuous to raise the spectre of clergy being forced to solemnize same sex unions as a reason for opposing the Bill.

3) Traditionalists who believe that the fact that marriage has long been defined by Australian society (implicitly or explicitly) as being a union between one man and one woman is good enough reason to continue defining it that way.

In some times and places the view that intimate relations between people of different races was an abomination was given expression in so-called anti-miscegenation laws. If such laws were in place in Australia, I would not have been able to marry the man to whom I am in fact married. The point is that the social institution of marriage differs from time to time and place to place. Parliamentarians cannot excuse themselves from taking responsibility for this society's current definition of marriage by kidding themselves that the definition of marriage is somehow immutable.

4) People who believe that child rearing is best done in families with one mother and one father.

The short answer to this is that, even if this is true, a society which accepts single parenthood and child rearing by unmarried same sex couples cannot reasonably balk at child rearing by married same sex couples.

5) Parliamentarians who have no problem with marriage equality themselves but believe that it is opposed by a majority in their electorate.

Even if there is a majority opposed to same sex marriage that is not sufficient justification for a legal definition of marriage which has such a negative impact on a minority group. Denying same-sex attracted people the ability to participate in an important institution of our society, i.e. marriage, on equal terms with heterosexual people sends an implicit message to same sex-attracted people that

the parliament of this country believes that their relationships are inherently inferior. That message often has a profoundly negative impact on the mental health of those subjected to this unacceptable discrimination by the Australian state and also reinforces the homophobic views of some in society.

In summary, there is no good reason for voting against the Bill and every good reason for voting in favour of it. I hope that good reason prevails.

Yours sincerely

Dr Savitri Taylor