



## Additional Comments

### Mr Graham Perrett MP, Chair, and Ms Laura Smyth MP

We appreciate the opportunity to hold this inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 (the Bandt/Wilkie Bill) and Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 (the Jones Bill). We are pleased to contribute to the public debate and to provide comment to the Parliament prior to its vote on the question of marriage equality.

Marriage equality has been a topic of discussion for many years now and we believe that the conduct of that debate reflects Australia's tolerant and progressive culture. We are grateful to the public for providing input into the inquiry. The level of public participation in this inquiry is unprecedented in the history of the House of Representatives parliamentary committees.

We hope that the report and our additional comments will aid the Parliament in determining the passage of the bills. The report has examined the proposed amendments to the Marriage Act in light of historical changes to that Act affecting Indigenous Australians and the appropriate age of consent. These changes demonstrate that attitudes to marriage eligibility and equality have evolved with changing social attitudes. It is for the Parliament to determine whether to accept the current proposed changes.

While we accept that different types of relationship recognition may be available to couples in some Australian jurisdictions, those recognition arrangements are limited, inconsistent, and do not equate to marriage in the eyes of most Australians.

We note the particular significance given to marriage by various faith based organisations which provided evidence to the inquiry, and the diversity of religious views on same-sex marriage equality.

However, we also note the expectation of a separation of church and state in Australian society. We are satisfied that this is not compromised by the amendments proposed in either bill.

We acknowledge the strength of public interest in the proposals, as demonstrated by the volume of public responses to the inquiry. We were moved by the passion and intensity of the contributions made by members of the public and organisations. As such we have included, at the end of these comments, a broad selection of some of the views that members of the Australian community hold, drawn from responses to the inquiry. We consider that the inquiry process has provided a balanced selection of public responses on issues including the role and composition of families, equality and freedom from discrimination.

Having made significant advances in ensuring equal rights for same sex couples, we believe that equal opportunity in marriage is a further progressive step in ensuring equal rights in Australian society. Gay and lesbian couples should be given the opportunity to have the foundation of their relationships recognised in the same way as heterosexual relationships are recognised under the Marriage Act.

The Jones and Bandt / Wilkie Bills will be debated in the House of Representatives and all Members of Parliament, including members of the Committee, will vote on these bills. In deliberating about these bills we know that the Parliament is tasked with a weighty responsibility. Australia is a nation that respects the diversity of its citizens. In considering social change and the shape of Australia's future, the Parliament must both lead the nation and appreciate the values of a modern nation.

We commend the Committee Report to the Parliament and ask each Member of the Parliament to weigh carefully the views and evidence presented in their deliberations on the bills.

Mr Graham Perrett MP, Chair  
18 June 2012

Ms Laura Smyth MP  
18 June 2012

## Further comments—Mr Graham Perrett MP

The Committee received a record number of responses to this inquiry, in the form of letters and emails and input into the online survey. I would like to reiterate that the online survey was not a poll or ‘vote’ on whether the bills should be passed or not. It provided a quick and easy means for a large volume of people to participate and make their views known anonymously. Many of the participants chose to make comments, and a sample of these is provided below.

### Comments on relationships

*It is in our society’s best interests to foster and support loving, committed relationships.*

*Human relationships are not determined by sex or biology, but by the quality of the love, trust and care between the participants and their commitment to each other.*

*I believe that marriage, as an institution in Australia, is about recognising couples’ relationships in the eyes of the state, society, friends and family.*

*One of the primary reasons for the development of the institution of marriage was to ensure social and economic security by applying formal recognition and thus mutual responsibilities to relationships.*

*Marriage is a social contract between two adults. In our society it isn’t just a religious contract, with it comes duties, obligations, and benefits between the two parties. Our laws recognise the unique nature of this status and bestow special conditions on this relationship.*

*Legal and community recognition that a committed relationship between two people (whether opposite or same sex) is important to me. Relationships are important in our society as support for one another is required to live life.*

*In Australia marriage is the main way that we as a society recognise the importance of relationships.*

*Making a commitment to a relationship is important and marriage is one way of formalising that commitment.*

*Marriage is a special relationship between a man and a woman for the raising of children in an environment where both genders are represented. A different recognition of same sex couples seems more appropriate than redefining a relationship which has been the basis of our society for centuries.*

*In my opinion, marriage is the union between two parties that choose to spend the rest of their lives together.*

*Gay people are already forming life-long relationships and having children together. They are in all points of substance no different to straight couples. They (and their children) deserve the same legal recognition and protection that marriage provides to straight families.*

*Marriage is the fundamental basis of family, and thus of society. Marriage allows children to have relationships with their biological parents, and for biological parents to have relationships with their children.*

### **Comments in support of same-sex marriage**

*Marriage is a legal construct legally recognising a relationship between two people. By any objective measure, a same-sex relationship has all the same qualities of an opposite-sex relationship. Some last, some do not. Some involve children, some do not. To deny committed same-sex couples the rights, responsibilities, and recognition of Marriage is discriminatory and sends the message that they are second class citizens.*

*Marriage, insofar as it concerns the Australian government, is the civil institution created by the recognition of a relationship between two people, and any legal implications that recognition entails. The religious institution of marriage is related, but separate, to this civil institution. There is, therefore, no reason to exclude same-sex couples from legal recognition of their relationship on the basis of religious norms.*

*As a secular government, the Australian Parliament should recognise all lifetime commitments between couples regardless of religious prohibitions.*

*Marriage is an expression of commitment and security. It should not be restricted. All human beings have the right to equality before the law.*

*Symbolically we need to show that gay people are not excluded from our civic institutions (the religious institution of marriage is a matter for the respective religions but the legal and civic notion of marriage should apply to all).*

*Society is constantly changing, and it is time we started to act upon these changes, rather than dictating old traditions.*

*Marriage is about two people uniting before God and for legal recognition in the community, and I believe that if two people of the same sex want to commit themselves to each other for the rest of their lives, then they should have the same rights as everyone else.*

*At present, a large fraction of our society is excluded access to the legal rights and privileges of marriage. This is morally wrong, socially destructive, and potentially devastating for those affected.*

*All consenting adults should have access to the institution of marriage, with the consenting adult of their choice. To only allow marriage between opposite sexes is discrimination based on sexual orientation, and thus is not equal rights.*

*Families with same-sex parents deserve the same social, legal and religious protections offered to them that other families have access to, something that only marriage equality can provide.*

*Recognising same-sex marriages is about saying that Australia recognises all types of families and relationships and does not discriminate based on sexual preference. This is how I want Australia to be viewed by others and how Australians should view each other.*

*Marriage is the foundation of a loving and stable relationship, and should be available to all Australians who wish to celebrate it.*

*I support the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 over the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 as the former is a more inclusive, complete version of the legislation. Discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual orientation is prohibited in other acts, and should therefore be removed from the Marriage Act. The current situation of disallowing same sex marriage in a society where discrimination is prohibited is a case of everyone is equal, but some are less equal than others.*

*Our life is like that of many other Australian families. We enjoy planning (and going on) family holidays, we attend our local Catholic Church on Sundays. All-in-all we lead a pretty boring life. One thing that we would like to do, but can't, is to marry. We want our children to grow up knowing that their parents have the same rights as everyone else. This is not a dangerous or radical proposition. After all, the desire to fall in love and grow old with someone is not restricted to heterosexuals.*

### **Comments in opposition to same-sex marriage**

*Marriage has always meant the union of one man and one woman for life. This is the nucleus of family which is the foundation of our society. It is essential that the sanctity of this definition and this union is safeguarded now and into the future.*

*There are many different kinds of relationships in our society, each with their own purpose, and I believe we should honour traditional marriage for what it is.*

*Marriage is a sacred union between a man and woman. If homosexual people wish to have a union, it should be called something different.*

*Marriage is deeply valued by a large proportion of the population for cultural and religious reasons and this should be respected.*

*Marriage is a religious act not a legal act and therefore politics should not be making laws to influence any religion to change their beliefs. Marriage by definition is the joining of a man and a woman into a holy union.*

*I believe that it is the best interest of Australian families if we used God's standard as the guide for morality and not public opinion. We have seen how moving away from God's standard has resulted in a decay of the family unit. I therefore do not support legalising gay marriage.*

*The definition of marriage being between a man and a wife cannot be amended to include same sex couples. If same sex marriage was to be legalised, society will break down.*

*I believe in the biblical definition of marriage, being for one man and one woman. I don't think the definition of marriage can be, or should be expanded.*

*There will be ramifications for the way in which 'marriage' is viewed for heterosexual couples.*

*The definition of 'marriage' is the union of a man and a woman. This doesn't contain any 'moral' considerations, that's just the definition of the word. If you change the definition, that's not the same word.*

*I believe marriage is between a man and a woman and therefore the sanctity of this must be protected. As a society we need traditions and firm foundations to build on.*

*Marriage is an ancient convention that provides a formalised arrangement for a relationship of love and nurture with a primary goal of providing a healthy and stable environment for the raising of children.*

*Marriage is not simply a loving, committed relationship between two people, but a unique kind of physical and emotional union which is open to the possibility of new life. It is not a discrimination against homosexual couples to uphold marriage as being between a man and a woman. Marriage and same sex unions are essentially different realities.*

*Marriage has always meant the union of difference, leading to the issue and raising of children, and this does not naturally follow from a gay union. I oppose the redefining of marriage, as it will destroy the very nature of that relationship.*

## **Personal stories**

*My partner & I have been together now for 17 years. As far as we, our family & friends are concerned, we are married. We both contribute to our local community & have careers in the private & government sectors. We pay tax & have a mortgage, too but the best we can be offered, as far as our relationship status is concerned, is 'defacto'. It feels like a second rate concession when our contribution is first rate.*

*I have been with my boyfriend for 4 years and we love each other dearly. One day I would like to get married, but it is sad if my love is deemed inferior because of arbitrary reasons.*

*As a 23-year-old individual I have grown up with an acceptance that same-sex relationships are normal and legitimate in every sense. I honestly believe there is a large generational gap and by bringing in this legislation it will help to begin to reduce this.*

*I would like to support my daughter in her quest to marry, and have that marriage formally recognised with her long time partner. I have been married to my wife for more than thirty years.*

*if they pass, it'll mean that my partner and i can finally get married, after 12 years. there'll be a narrative and language that people can understand and get their heads around. our family will gradually become safer as society is led by legislation to understand that we should be treated equally.*

*I have been in a same sex relationship for 32 YEARS and cannot understand why after all these years there is still not recognized equality for persons in same sex relationships.*

*Changing the law to enable me to marry my same sex partner will mean that we will be able to seek equal treatment in our public lives. For example, my partner's employer (UN) will recognise our 30 year relationship fully if our country recognises our marriage. This will include health care, leave and moving arrangements and superannuation.*

*My little sister is a lesbian. Ever since she told me, I never want to see my sister upset again if I can help her get through it. The thought of her not being able to get married is unjust and unconstitutional. Please stop this inequality and recognise that we are all people just trying to do the best we can in this world, with the little time we have. Please make it is easier for my sister to live in this society without inequality and discrimination based on sexual orientation.*

*I am Australian. I am a daughter. I am a sister. I am a niece. I am a cousin. I am a friend. I am a university graduate. I am a teacher. I am a partner. I am in love. I am...not allowed to legally marry. I want to watch my partner grow old and get wrinkles. I want to share my adventure called life with her. I want to experience together the overwhelming joy of childbirth and raise children in a loving family home. I want to walk down the aisle in a beautiful white dress just like every little girl dreams of. I love being Australian. I love Australia. I am proud of where I come from and how fortunate we are. I would love if Australia felt the same way about me. I am no different from your own sister, daughter, niece, cousin or friend....how would you feel if the country they loved did not allow for them to get married? Let me help with that answer....it hurts.*

*As a gay woman who grew up dreaming of her big white dress wedding day it breaks my heart to be almost 30 and facing a future where I can not marry the love of my life as should be my right, as should be anyone's right.*

*I am an 18 year old female and although my sexual orientation is different to others, I still grew up imagining myself walking down the aisle with the person I love. I still dream of*

*that one, perfect day which I can share with my friends and family. The education system within Australia teaches us to be independent, strong and accepting yet why is the homosexual community discriminated and restricted by the current laws? I believe that everyone should have the right to marry anyone they wish to, and I believe that the government needs to take a step forward in their growth to legalise same sex marriage.*

*I have been married to the woman I love for 55 years and we are both Christians. We believe that same sex marriages should be permitted because they imply fidelity, love and happiness.*

*I have been married for forty-eight years, and can see no reason why any couple who wish to make such a commitment should not be able to do so.*

*I believe in equality. I have been married for 50 years and have 2 children so I have no personal axe to grind. Marriage is about love and commitment and doesn't only apply to heterosexual people. Some people think that marriage is about children but lots of people get married without any intention of having children. And quite a lot of heterosexual people should never have children.*

*As a gay man, a Catholic man, a man from a cultural minority, and a registered psychologist - I know very well the implications of both sides of the debate. It has been my experience that prevention of same-sex marriage, and lack of recognition of same-sex marriage performed in foreign countries, perpetuates gay people's experience of segregation and discrimination. ANYTHING we can do as a community to send the message that we are equal goes some way to undo and prevent further damage.*

*My Experience growing up as a straight male in a highly Christian environment, both at school and at home has taught me that love is the greatest thing two people may share. Love is greater than gender and anyone should have the chance to express this in a way that is recognized by a country as Great as Australia.*

*I was raised in a Mormon (LDS) family and for a long time I believed I had the blueprint for life, happiness and could speak to the rules god had laid out for us. I came to realise that no one has a right to control another's life so long as they aren't hurting anyone else. Beyond that I realised how self righteous I was to think I was better than someone else just because I happen to love to opposite sex. I've since formed amazing friendships with LGTBI people and those connections will last for life. I've met some of the most loving, sincere people who are now considered part of my family. They raise families and their children deserve the same rights as other kids - to have their parents marry if they want to and to know they are recognised as a family unit.*

*I believe that permitting same sex marriage in Australia will cause more harm than good. Giving 4000 gay couples in Australia happiness by allowing this bill to pass, does not outweigh the outrage that the religious and independent belief organisations will have. I myself believe that gay couples should be allowed to get married, but from a utilitarian point of view, this would cause more harm than good. P.S i am 15 years old.*



*My wife and I have been married for 37 years this year and believe that marriage must be recognised as only between a man and a woman. This relationship is the best structure for the family unit and society.*

*We have been married for 51 years and have 4 children and 11 grand children. The proposed law changes would downgrade our marriage to the level of the union of 2 homosexuals.*

*I am strenuously opposed to same sex marriage as this notion goes against the laws of nature, traditional culture and religion. Having been married to my wife for 40 years, I find it repulsive and insulting that the people supporting this notion are trying to push this legislation through. If same sex couples wish to live together that is none of my business and I would not discriminate against them in any way. However, I feel that the people trying to legalise same sex marriage are trying to gate crash our sacred institution of marriage between a man and a woman.*

*I do not agree that a same sex union is an equivalent relationship to a marriage between a man and a woman. I have been married for nearly thirty years and raised five children to adulthood with my wife. I think maybe without intending this bill demeans the specialness of the relationship which has so defined my life by making it one of a number of 'valid' expressions of human relationship. Find other ways to deal with same sex and defacto relationships but don't make them equivalent to marriage with the stroke of a pen.*

*I have been married for nearly 20 years now. I entered into marriage for life, to the woman I still love. Our wedding was conducted in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Australia witnessed by our family, friends and our God. I do not want my marriage to stand for anything other than what we entered into 20 years ago. Please do not change the laws to make marriage something different for whom marriage works now.*

*Australian religious groups including Christians and indeed non-religious groups identify with the definition of marriage as relating to a male and female. They have the right to claim the maintenance of a long established sacred covenant that is held dear by people, not only locally but also globally. I have been married for 36 years and I do expect the legal relationship I entered into maintains the original definition.*

*I have been married for 37 years and I would feel very disappointed if our government were to change the definition of marriage. This would mean a lot of married couples who are opposed to same sex marriage would be just put into some category that is not what they took a vow to. Where does this leave them?*

*I work in the area of child protection and so some of reasoning is based on my experience working with broken families and the effects on children. I have seen many varied family groups and my conclusions are that even though it may not be perfect, children thrive best when they have both a male and female parent.*

*Because of my Christian beliefs which are strongly held, I believe that marriage should be between a man and woman as it is the natural way to build a stable society.*

*It is my belief that a marriage should only be between a man and a woman, based not only on my religious beliefs, but also on my experiences in interacting with both same-sex and traditional couples. It is my belief that marriages are lasting unions, and allowing same-sex couples to get married would delegitimise the sacred union of marriage, as there may be higher chances for divorce.*

*I have had the privilege of working as an accredited welfare worker, church pastor, marriage celebrant and counsellor over a forty six year period. During that time I experienced living and working with people from different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs, and one thing stood out, the primacy of the marriage between a man and a woman and the importance of the family unit as the building block for a healthy society. The current description in law has it right*

*Marriage is a special relationship between one man and one woman. It holds religious significance to many people, including my family and this should be respected. I worry that redefining marriage could change my religious freedom. Families are built on marriage and society built on strong family life. Research has shown that a child with married, biological mother and father do best. I believe that this is the model we should aim for in society.*

*Although you are elected as my representative I do not give you the power to change elements of my life and of the world that are far beyond the purview of any government.*

*My rights as a 'married' person are being ridiculed by the selfishness of homosexual couples. I took my marriage vows very seriously indeed - they are personal and meaningful in a relationship between a male and female. Find another word and you might be surprised at the support you get.*

I commend the Committee Report to the Parliament and ask each Member of the Parliament to weigh carefully the views and evidence presented and to vote with the courage of their convictions and to support Australia moving towards equality for all.

Mr Graham Perrett MP  
Chair  
18 June 2012

## Mr Shayne Neumann MP and Mr Mike Symon MP

We do not believe there is anything like sufficient community consensus which would justify changes to such a fundamental societal institution as marriage.

Marriage, as the union between one man and one woman has been steeped in history, law, culture and religion for millennia. This is a fact which cannot be denied.

We believe that marriage should remain "the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life" which incorporates the traditional and historic English and Australian case law definition.

There has been much exaggerated comment from different parties during the course of this public debate and evidence of the same can be found in many of the submissions to this Inquiry.

We do not accept "the thin end of the wedge" style of argument of some opponents of same sex marriage. We find the references to polygamy et al to be repugnant and ridiculous.

Equally, we do not accept the contention of some proponents of same sex marriage that this argument is solely about marriage equality. This contention is disingenuous.

In Australia, marriage is not permitted by law where the blood relationship is too close and further, at law, there are clear restrictions on the minimum age of marriage.

Australia is a diverse country and its relationships and families are diverse as well.

Love, understanding and acceptance within relationships and families should be celebrated and cherished.

As Members of Parliament we have been pleased to have supported more than 80 legislative amendments in such areas as social security, immigration and superannuation to end discrimination against same sex couples during the terms of this Federal Labor Government.

Nevertheless, we do not think that the framers of the Australian Constitution had same sex 'marriage' in mind when they enumerated the Commonwealth Government's powers to legislate with respect to marriage in Section 51 of the Constitution.

We think it more likely that the classic marriage definition of "Hyde v Hyde" would have been the common understanding.

It is to be noted that there was robust debate in the submissions received (both written and oral) re whether the Commonwealth has constitutional power to legislate for same sex 'marriage' or if the matter is for the States to decide.

If either of these Bills passes through Parliament then it will be for the High Court to decide the constitutional limits which apply.

Finally, to change the meaning of marriage is a major step with many legal, familial and cultural implications as is evident from the submissions to the Inquiry.

Both Bills propose to remove the terms of 'husband' and 'wife' from the Marriage Act but there is nothing in the draft report that examines the effect of that provision on the status of the many millions of people in Australia who are married already as husband and wife.

We consider that there should be no change made to the Marriage Act in the terms of these two Bills without the clearest and most widespread community support.

Mr Shayne Neumann MP  
18 June 2012

Mr Mike Symon MP  
18 June 2012

## Hon. Sharman Stone MP

In my view, and after hearing all of the evidence presented, the passing of either of these two bills would not deliver the changed attitudes to long-term relationships between same-sex couples which their advocates desire.

The Coalition does not support either of these bills because doing so would mean breaking a commitment we made to the Australian people at the last federal election.

The Coalition has long been opposed to changes to Commonwealth law that could diminish the institution of marriage. This position was represented to the Australian electorate at the 2010, 2007 and 2004 federal elections.

I do not agree that the view towards marriage in Australia has changed since the 2010 federal election. The Coalition believes that the definition of marriage, as contained in the existing provisions of the *Marriage Act 1974* (Cth), appropriately reflects the common understanding of marriage in the Australian community – ‘the union of a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.’ I am not persuaded that this definition should be changed.

In relation to the issue of discrimination, the Coalition is of the view that it is widely accepted that there are certain customs and practices in any society that are unique to certain relationships. To acknowledge this does not amount to discrimination.

The Coalition is of the view that marriage is a *sui generis* institution and its limitation to people of the opposite sex is not to discriminate against people who wish to belong to same-sex relationships, but rather acknowledge that in Australia marriage is a unique institution which, in accordance with its traditional meaning and purpose, has only been regarded as being between a man and a woman. It has never been intended to apply to any other kind of relationship or status.

The Coalition’s view is that all Australians should have freedom from discrimination and on the question of discrimination against same-sex couples, our position is clear and unambiguous: we do not accept discrimination on the basis of sexuality. The removal of discriminatory provisions against same-sex couples in Commonwealth law began under the previous Coalition Government in 2004 and the Coalition not only strongly supported, but substantially improved and extended, further legislative amendments to eliminate discrimination in 84 other Commonwealth statutes in 2008.

In reaching my decision not to support these bills, I have considered this issue bearing in mind three important values: that commitments made to the Australian people at an election are important; that all people are entitled to equal respect and their relationships are entitled to equal respect regardless of their sexuality; and that marriage has only ever been understood to mean one thing in Australia, and that understanding ought to continue.

I do not therefore support either of the bills considered in this review. Marriage should continue to refer to the union of a man and woman, a civil union or any other term preferred by same-sex couples is not inferior or discriminating, it simply observes the differences.

Hon. Sharman Stone MP  
18 June 2012

## Mr Ross Vasta MP

The Coalition does not support either of these bills because doing so would mean breaking a commitment we made to the Australian people at the last federal election.

The Coalition has long been opposed to changes to Commonwealth law that could diminish the institution of marriage. This position was represented to the Australian electorate at the 2010, 2007 and 2004 federal elections.

I do not agree with the majority of the Committee that the view towards marriage in Australia has changed since the 2010 federal election. The Coalition believes that the definition of marriage as contained in the existing provisions of the *Marriage Act 1974* (Cth) appropriately reflects the common understanding of marriage in the Australian community – ‘the union of a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.’ I am not persuaded by the evidence before the Committee that this definition should be changed.

Some of the submissions received by the Committee address the issue of discrimination. It is widely accepted that there are certain customs and practices in any society that are unique to certain relationships. To acknowledge this does not amount to discrimination.

The Coalition is of the view that marriage is a *sui generis* institution and its limitation to people of the opposite sex is not to discriminate against people who wish to belong to same-sex relationships, but rather acknowledge that in Australia marriage is a unique institution which, in accordance with its traditional meaning and purpose, has only been regarded as being between a man and a woman. It has never been intended to apply to any other kind of relationship or status.

The Coalition members agree with the majority Committee view that all Australians should have freedom from discrimination and on the question of discrimination against same-sex couples, our position is clear and unambiguous: we do not accept discrimination on the basis of sexuality. The removal of discriminatory provisions against same-sex couples in Commonwealth law began under the previous Coalition Government in 2004 and the Coalition not only strongly supported, but substantially improved and extended, further legislative amendments to eliminate discrimination in 84 other Commonwealth statutes in 2008.

In reaching my decision not to support these Bills, I have considered this issue bearing in mind three important values: that commitments made to the Australian

people at an election are important; that all people are entitled to equal respect and their relationships are entitled to equal respect regardless of their sexuality; and that marriage has only ever been understood to mean one thing in Australia, and that understanding ought to continue.

I recommend that the bills not proceed.

Mr Ross Vasta MP  
18 June 2012



## Mr Adam Bandt MP

### You can't hurry love

The Australian public is ready to remove discrimination from our marriage laws.

The inquiry's survey had over a quarter of a million responses, with 64% supporting the Bandt/Wilkie bill to ensure all people can marry the one they love.

This figure accords with the many opinion polls conducted over many years, all pointing to one conclusion: Australians are ready for Parliament to do the right thing and bring about marriage equality.

Unfortunately, the inquiry shows that although sentiment is changing, many Members of Parliament are still not yet ready for equality.

As such, the push for equal love stands at a challenging crossroads.

On the one hand, the public would welcome Parliament doing the right thing and legislating for equal marriage.

On the other, the Labor party is divided and not ready to support reform. As such, reform is now in the hands of Coalition members of goodwill, who have to date been prohibited from exercising a conscience vote.

With the Greens the only party unequivocally in favour of change, the only way marriage reform will be achieved during this parliament is if proponents from across the chamber work together – it may not be easy but it can be done and it should be done.

Here is where the Greens differ from others. Until the old parties acknowledge that the majority of Australians wish to see marriage discrimination ended and stop delaying the inevitable, by either throwing their full weight behind reform or allowing all members of parliament the right to vote freely, we do not wish this matter to be rushed to a vote only to see it defeated. This would set back the cause of reform.

We have a unique parliament and a unique chance to progress the principles of equal love and equal marriage. It would be disappointing if we did not use this opportunity but it would be even more disappointing if we 'rang the bells' too early and divided the parliament simply because some wish this matter off the national agenda.

A premature vote on marriage equality would risk defeat but we have nothing to lose by continuing the dialogue in our national Parliament.

I, of course, would prefer to see a Greens' bill become law. But it is also clear from the report that changes to both bills should be considered.

I strongly welcome the committee's suggestion that a single bill proceed through parliament. Because of the limitations on reform set out above, such a bill should be co-sponsored by members of all parties in the chamber, as well as by independents.

The Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011, which I introduced, showed that a bill sponsored by all sides of politics can pass into law when people work together on important issues. I hope that a similar approach to marriage equality can be adopted.

As such, instead of recommending a premature vote on the Bandt/Wilkie bill only for it to face defeat, I renew my invitation to work with members of the Labor party and the Coalition to co-sponsor a single bill so that we have the maximum chance of success.

In the meantime, debate should continue in the House.

I urge all members to reflect on the value of fairness, the importance of equality and the power of love. These forces make equal marriage inevitable. I sincerely hope that our current Parliament is the one to make this historic change.

Mr Adam Bandt MP  
18 June 2012