

INQUIRY INTO SAME SEX MARRIAGE LAW IN NSW

Name: Mr Colin D Ellis

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Social Issues Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Subject: Marriage Equality

I write this letter in support of same-sex marriage. My husband and I have lived together for the past 23 years. During this time we have lived together as equal partners in a loving and committed relationship. We have a loving family and friends who care and support our relationship. Through our time we have supported each other and our family at times of sadness, such as when Paul's mother had cancer, when his father died, and when my father had his stroke. When Mary, Paul's mother was diagnosed with cancer I was the one who was told first. Bringing the family together at Wagga Wagga Hospital to learn more of what had happened and to organise a family conference on what could be done. At the time I was a Clinical Nurse Consultant in Palliative Care. Every weekend Paul and I would travel from Sydney to Batlow Hospital to get his mother home for the day and support Paul's father. We were there at the end, and together Paul and I washed and dressed Mary's body so she was shown with dignity to the rest of the family. In 2010 when my father had his stroke, Paul was there to support me as I had to travel back to the UK to support my father and my mother who was also sick. This was a difficult time and I was blessed to have someone there to help me through this.

Many of our friends we have met travelling, especially when trekking and climbing in Nepal and Africa. We have been accepted as a couple wherever we have gone. In fact the last time when we travelled to Nepal again we were respected by Guides, Porters, and others who were also our friends. Even during our trekking and climbing Island Peak our friend (and guide) made sure we were accommodated as a couple.

Both of us are employed in full time work, I am a Nursing Unit Manager who has been a nurse for over 32 years; Paul has been a teacher for special needs children for over 17 years.

Because of past laws that left us vulnerable we felt it vital to put in place legal strategies early on in our relationship that should one or other becomes hospitalised or dies the other has access and is the beneficiary; these strategies are taken for granted with heterosexual married couples.

We don't have children of our own but we do have nephews and nieces, and great nephews and nieces who we have contact with, when not in person because of distance we do communicate via social networks such as Facebook and email. We also support a family including two children in Nepal, and a child in Kenya. It would have been good to have children of our own but in the past it was not possible and now it is too late.

On the 1st October 2012 we decided that it was time we got married. Given that this was denied us by the Federal Government we looked at alternatives. So with the help of Icelandic officials we got married in Reykjavik, Iceland. Initially we thought this would be done alone as we had no expectation of anyone joining with us. How wrong were we? After announcing to family and friends what we intended to do, it felt like the world had shifted on its axis. Family and friends were determined to join us and had already organised travel arrangements within days of being told. If you are not familiar with Iceland it truly is the other side of the world. Other friends and colleagues

organised pre-wedding celebrations which took us totally by surprise, we had never thought we would get this level of support. At the same time we had cards and gifts being sent to us; and congratulations came from friends in other Countries such as Canada, Ireland, Nepal, and New Zealand. We also had amazing support from people we hardly knew who would stop us in the street; I had patients and their families congratulating us. This support was very humbling; and this level of support continued while we were in Iceland with complete strangers congratulating us and welcoming us. Businesses here were also helpful with the preparations, Flight Centre at North Rocks, Zamuels Jewellery at Penrith, Myers in Sydney to name a few. When we returned home we placed a notice in the Hawkesbury Gazette thanking family and friends. The response again was unexpected as others who had not previously known were contacting us, including strangers to give congratulations.

In 2012 Australia was at a fork in the road. Was it going to support acceptance, tolerance, love, an inclusive Australia by embracing same-sex marriage/marriage equality, or take the path that rejects diversity, promotes and sanctions hate, fear and bigotry? An amazing paradox occurred, the majority of Australians were found to support marriage equality, two Federal inquiries supported the changes to the Marriage Act in favour of marriage equality but given all this the Federal Government decided to turn its back on democracy and voted against the majority of the Australian people.

So why is marriage equality so important? This personally has been an interesting question. For us we are legally married even though it is not recognised in Australian Law. We are married, our family, friends, colleagues and many people within our Community strongly support our marriage. But this is more than just two people wanting their marriage recognised legally, this is about equality. This is about us not being viewed as second class citizens by our Governments. It is about our human right to be treated the same as our straight family and friends. But just as important it is

about sending a message to young Australians who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersexed, straight, or those trying to work out who they are, a message. This message is that they are all important and that their community and Government support them. That even at times where it may seem all too hard it will get better. In fact it is because the Governments' backing of marriage equality demonstrates that all the initiatives that have been created to stop discrimination, violence, bullying and harassment are supported 100%. Marriage equality helps send this message to those who hate, that our Government takes human rights, and within them equality, seriously.

It would be great one day that we can drop the need to reference 'same-sex' in relation to marriage and I believe we all look forward to this day.

The NSW Government has been given a challenge and opportunity. The challenge is to do what is right by being a truly inclusive Government; the opportunity is to get the message out there to the rest of the Country and the World, that NSW welcomes everyone equally. New South Wales is the place to do business, to work or study without fear, and to be a tourist without harassment. Not just welcoming for LGBTI individuals and couples; but their straight allies, and others who are concerned about some of the discrimination, bullying and harassment that has been reported in the media here and overseas based on race, religion and homophobia that contradicted this message of inclusiveness. New South Wales welcomes everyone.

Please support marriage equality in New South Wales.

Yours faithfully

Colin D Ellis RN, M.Clinical Practice, M.Counselling.

