

INQUIRY INTO SAME SEX MARRIAGE LAW IN NSW

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Same Sex Marriage Submission

There are a number of reasons why same sex marriages should be made legal that range from the obvious social advantages of ending discrimination to same sex couples to certain economic advantages to the ever growing wedding industry in NSW and across Australia.

As an authorised marriage celebrant on the South Coast of NSW I admit to having a vested interest in this area but I also have a unique insight on the advantages of a strong wedding industry for our local area. The current discriminatory laws outlawing same sex marriages (despite what the opponents suggest) undermines the concept of marriage in our society. So much so that many people are following such high profile leaders such as David Pocock in postponing their nuptials until this archaic law is changed.

In terms of the economic impact of a change to the Marriage Act to support same sex couples - as the website www.weddingindustry.com.au points out – “the Australian wedding industry generates over \$2 billion annually, with many weddings costing in excess of \$20,000 and an estimated 116,000 weddings taking place each year.” These costs include fees that go toward celebrants like myself, caterers, decorators, dress makers, venues and car hires. It is an essential part of our local economy and community. For example our local surf club – the Mollymook Surf Club generates the vast majority of its income from hosting wedding receptions at \$250 per event. The change of the law toward allowing same sex ceremonies would increase this which would put more money into the local community. It would also result in more work for celebrants (such as myself) due to Church’s reluctance to perform these ceremonies.

How many more weddings this would result in is open for debate, however when you consider that there were 33,714 couples within Australia identified in the last census. If, at a conservative estimate, we said 50% of these couples wanted to be married under a change of law that would mean a potential boost of over \$168,000,000 to the economy Australia wide through the wedding industry (based at \$10,000 per wedding) going directly to many small businesses and local communities.

This is already accepted wisdom in the United States who have recently changed marriage laws in several states - <http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=215452>

For the record - There is no economic argument for leaving the law as is.

There are also a number of social reasons for ending this discrimination that should be self explanatory but the main aspect to consider is that there have been various historical prejudices and discrimination against a range of people from women to indigenous groups throughout history. However the winds of change have always swept through to eliminate these and anyone with any common sense can see that this is about to happen with same sex couples as well so the choice is simple from a social and moral perspective – do you want to be on the right side of history or not?

There have been many arguments made against the law being changed in this area but none have been substantial. They are summarised and dismissed below

- a) Allowing same sex marriage would open the door for bigamy and bestiality to also be legalised: A common debating trick to try to deflect an argument toward less popular alternatives – however I'll let others debate the merits of those forms of commitment – we are debating same sex marriage here – nothing more nothing less.
- b) The children of these couples will somehow suffer: This is again a separate argument but interestingly enough one that has been run and won as same sex couples have been able to adopt children in NSW since 2010. The opponents of same sex marriage have already lost this debate so why bring it up?
- c) It's against our religion: It is against section 116 of the Constitution to establish any religious tests for any laws so this is another irrelevant argument for not changing the law. If churches want to refrain from same sex marriages they should be allowed to do so even if it leads to them becoming more irrelevant than they already are in today's society.
- d) It is against the cultural institution of the pro-creative relationship of a man and a woman: Another nonsensical argument. Marriage has nothing to do with starting a family. If I could charge double as a celebrant for couples who already have children I could retire next year. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the birth rate would decline if same sex marriage were legalised.
- e) The law defines marriage as between "a man and woman" and should not be changed: I could understand this argument (but not agree with it) if that had been the case for 100 years but it was only changed by that relic from the 1950s (John Howard) in 2004 to try to make this exact argument.
- f) It's our 'tradition': So was the concept of women staying at home and not having a vote (not to mention our "traditional" views on Aboriginal Australians). Traditions change with society's views and values and given that nearly 66% of Australians support same sex marriage this is another argument that has been run and won.
[\(http://www.australianmarriageequality.com/wp/2012/08/07/poll-shows-support-of-gay-marriage-at-all-time-high/\)](http://www.australianmarriageequality.com/wp/2012/08/07/poll-shows-support-of-gay-marriage-at-all-time-high/)

The change required for this law is simple – make the wording of the Marriage Act to state that Marriage is "the union of two people, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life"

I sincerely hope that common sense prevails in this argument and we follow the lead of countries such as the US, UK and many throughout Europe and across the world who have ended this long standing discrimination against fellow members of our community.

Regards,

Darren Clear – Authorised Celebrant