

2010 *What Matters?* Competition

YEAR 11/12 RUNNER-UP

Alinta Merrotsy, PLC Armidale

'I Do'- Pronouncing Same-Sex Couples Married

On the 25th of November, 2009, Warren McGaw and Chris Rumble were pronounced the first same-sex couple to be joined in civil partnership in Australia, under the Civil Partnerships Amendment Bill 2009.

The gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual (GLBT) community took this as a great step forward in marriage equality. However, the very next day, the Rudd government began discussing whether or not to have the bill overturned. This bill raises the issue of prejudice and equality in homosexual relationships. Current ALP policy supports relationship registers, but they refuse to shift position on marriage.

Penny Wong, currently a Labor Party minister, is setting an amazing example for young GLBT people, and yet this influential woman does not have the same rights as her colleagues.

Directly and indirectly, the government is making a free life hard for 'people like me.' By not acknowledging that differences are to be celebrated, by not educating the youth of today in matters of different sexualities, the future of 2% of our population has been decided against our wills.

Public opinion differs greatly from the Labor party's, as shown in surveys conducted in the last few years. In 2008, Woman's Weekly found over 70% of 15000 respondents promoted same-sex marriage. Last year, 60% of Australians in a national Galaxy survey agreed. A majority in all states voted in favour of GLBT marriage rights.

The Universal Declaration Of Human Rights, Article 21, states that 'The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.' The government has yet to use this majority view as the basis for their opinions on same-sex marriage.

Furthermore, Article 16 reads that 'Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.' This outlines the idea that any male or female person, no matter what their backgrounds or situations, has the right to be married, not to be discriminated against and that the right thing for our society to do is to give all marriages equal rights. However, before Australia makes same-sex marriage legal, the homophobia and misguided views still lingering in communities needs to be eliminated.

In schools, sexuality is often shown in a bad light. Although there has been no open proclamation or statement in the rulebook, at my school (a private girls school) it is a given that no one is to be openly lesbian. We live in an environment where, when asked certain direct questions, it is often hard to answer truthfully. Making the decision to write openly on this topic, and the issues surrounding it, was hard to make, as I can never be sure who will react negatively.

For me, and every young person who is "not-so-straight", leading a life we want relies on our government granting us the simple right of being normal. I cannot stand up and say truthfully that I am equal to my peers, to my friends, because I am not. I am not allowed to love in the same way as a 'normal,' straight person. I am not permitted to become a bride.

When you can prove that homosexuality is unnatural, when you can look us in the face and say that we don't deserve what you have, only then, perhaps we will accept this 'fact of life.'

Until then, pass the one law that will make love legal.