

3 September 2007

Dear Senator Allison,

This is a submission based on personal experience of the discrimination at Commonwealth level faced by same sex couples. I am an Australian who lived in the UK for 10 years before returning to Australia last year. My partner is British. Since returning to Australia I have been shocked to find how far Australia has lagged behind many European countries in the area of equality for same sex couples.

Una and I have a registered civil partnership in the UK and there we enjoyed the same rights under law to superannuation, inheritance, tax benefits, adoption etc as married heterosexual couples. Now that we are living in Australia we are suffering from discriminatory federal policy and legislation. Specific examples that affect us:

- *Lack of rights to tax benefits:* My partner, Una, is currently not working nor, under a temporary interdependent visa, can she claim any benefits, but I am not able claim any tax rebate even though she is my dependent spouse. Also, we cannot share our income for the Medicare Levy. We are therefore significantly financially disadvantaged in comparison to a heterosexual couple in the same situation. I have calculated the difference to be in the order of \$2500.
- *Requirement for approval to jointly own our house:* Una had to apply for FIRB (Foreign Investment Review Board) approval to jointly own our house and the approval is subject to us not renting it out at a later date. If she were partner to a man she would have had automatic approval.
- *Death Benefits from the CSS:* On my death, Una would receive less in benefits than a heterosexual partner would, from my contributions to the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme.

I am saddened that in the year 2006, this is the state of affairs in Australia. There are many people living overseas who will not return to Australia for this reason. The obvious choice is for us to move back to the UK, but my parents are entering their 70s and the reason for returning to Australia was to spend more time with them and be here if they require my support. Those opposing any reform in the name of "family values" should be reminded that the discrimination damages families.

Yours sincerely,

Katherine Eastaughffe