

# **Tips for lobbying your MP about Marriage equality**

by Shelley Argent

**When starting out it sometimes helps to gain ideas and opinions from others which may help you to begin forming your own opinion on how to proceed.** Often there are issues that we have considered that can be included in the debate that others may not have considered, or vice versa.

**1. Start out with simple steps:**

As your confidence grows, so will your ideas and plans  
keep drawing comparisons - eg your brother/sister chose to marry their partner and you cannot.

***Always keep your message simple so the listener can clearly understand your issue or concern.***

- **Think about what you are capable of doing:**  
You may be time poor or just need to get out of your comfort zone. The more you do this the easier it gets and you become more effective.
- Remain realistic and don't talk about the magical "they" and what they should be doing, concentrate on what you are doing and how you can achieve.
- Remain realistic you are not necessarily going to change the mind of the person to whom you are speaking, but you will give them something to think about later and Remain calm!

**Personalise your meeting:**

**Tell your personal stories before sharing your opinion:**

When we share a story the listener is not thinking why your argument is wrong, they just want to know what happens next. And like a Trojan horse your story delivers a message without the audience really knowing it's happening.

Find specific moments so your audience can picture, or better yet feel, what you're saying. For example, be this specific:

*I remember the day my daughter came out. We were in the kitchen and as I walked in after work my wife said, "There's something Alex wants to tell you."*

**Other tips:**

- You have been a couple for ... years and want the right to marry because.....
- You don't have a partner at the moment, but you do want to have the privilege and choice to marry in the future
- You want to see your friends able to marry because.....
- You want the same choices and rights as your siblings, friends etc because....

Avoid using the argument that it's **discriminatory legislation**, an **abuse of human rights** or **homophobic legislation**. The listener may easily become antagonistic because some like to tell you how their party was the first to legislate for.....

Never be abusive or aggressive, getting the MP offside will not help anyone, or make them want to change policy. It will just make the meeting finish early.

Also read information about what the negative believers are saying this will give you ideas when it comes to making your case.

### **Some negative beliefs are:**

- It's always been between a man and a woman
- same-sex marriage devalues or cheapens heterosexual couples marriage
- it's tradition
- What about family values?
- What about the children?
- the bible says.....it's against God, it's not natural, it's a sin etc
- not all lesbians and gays want to marry
- gays and straights are different and so civil unions are more appropriate than marriage
- this is change just for the sake of it
- marriage for lesbians and gays is presently not a priority

### **Other points to keep in mind:**

- How other countries including catholic and commonwealth countries are legislating for equality
- Have answers to combat the myths surrounding same sex couples, their marriages and children
- Couples married overseas are not recognised here in Australia
- Have answers prepared that differentiate between a civil union, relationship registers and marriage impact on same sex couples
- The most ludicrous argument is that "lesbians and gays could get married; they just need to marry someone of the opposite sex"
- Why do you want marriage equality for same sex couples? They now have all of the economic rights that straight couples have!
- Why does anyone want to get married in this day and age?

### **How to make your case**

- Read as much as you can, save newspaper articles and info from the internet. This can be helpful as prompts later, when writing a letter or making a presentation
- Again talk to others and when possible always talk to people who know more than you and use them as a sounding board about your approach

**Write your reasoning and beliefs down** and keep them, even take them with you, just in case you are nervous and forget what you want to say.

**When you write letters keep them for next time** because you can always add some lines or information to your last comments.

**Are you unsure about how to respond to and challenge opponents?**

Have your **standard answers and think about these beforehand** eg the bible/ when people talk about the bible and God. I always state “My God is a loving God, he doesn’t judge” “he doesn’t make mistakes”

I have a couple of Bible stories that make people think

- Centurion who had a 1000 slaves but wanted a particular one healed
- Naomi and Ruth with their special love that was above all else

**When it comes to marriage below is a long list of points that could refer to any couple:**

- Instant recognition
- Promotes respect and stability
- Removes next of kin issues
- Removes doubt about relationship if legal issues arise
- Plan future life together
- Lessens depression and substance abuse because of the feeling of being valued and needed.

When people say **it’s always been between a man and a woman**, one argument is “that doesn’t make it right, marriages are changing. For example, many people now marry multiple times, mixed race is now common, mixed religion is now a non issue, for example Catholics and Protestants. Same sex marriage is just another stage of evolvement in marriage which is happening in first world countries.

- **Marriage is about** emotional security, it’s about planning a life together. It’s about planning for old age. Research shows that couples who are married have less depression and more inclined to work through problems.
- **Marriage isn’t just about having children.**
- **Marriage is a now a choice not a given** and same sex couples should have the same choices.
- **When people discuss children in a marriage** - children don’t care what the gender or sexual orientation is of parents, it’s that they are loved and studies show...
- Discussing up to date studies is good.

**I would suggest:**

- Write letters to as many MP’s as possible and make the letters personal in some manner
- Write letters and media releases to papers and radio

- You need to keep it up, don't write just one letter, or one visit, take as many opportunities as possible, call them up and ask their opinions on topics.
- Encourage others to visit and write to their MP's.
- When visiting MP's etc take your story in hard copy and leave it with them, or take some research they can read later. Also use dot points and keep the information clear, short and sharp, don't ramble.
- When visiting MP's look as mainstream as possible. You need to play the game keep them in their comfort zone this way you will have more luck and they will be more inclined to listen.
- If you can't get a meeting ensure that you leave your opinion with the officer worker to pass on your message
- Call up talk back radio when they are discussing marriage, children etc and bring same sex families into the conversation
- Be on committees that want to bring change
- Don't become a rabble or militant because you will be ignored and not taken seriously.