



Public Questions Messenger

August 2012

Marriage and family issue (please print, copy and distribute)

A bulletin from the Public Questions Officer of Tasmanian Baptists
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Although the last three issues of the *Public Questions Messenger* have related to marriage and surrogacy, these matters are still of concern, with bills to redefine marriage to include same sex unions under debate in our national parliament and the Tasmanian Premier stating her intention to introduce same sex marriage legislation regardless of what happens federally. She has also signalled her intention to allow surrogacy without restricting it to partners of opposite sexes. Along with this goes consideration of whether same sex couples should be allowed to adopt children. These three proposals would have the effect of turning on its head our current understanding of marriage and family, which has served society well for centuries. This bulletin is intended to bring you up to date with recent developments and to help those who are concerned about the ultimate effect of these developments on society to be more effective in lobbying against them.

SAME SEX MARRIAGE

A very strong campaign has been conducted by the supporters of same sex marriage using the appealing but misleading catch phrase 'marriage equality'. But this campaign is not really about achieving equality in marriage or equality of access to it. It is about re-defining marriage in a way that conflicts with our long held understanding of it. It is about doing away with one of its most fundamental defining aspects – the inherent complementarity of a man and a woman. This would have detrimental flow-on effects for families and children. With the federal Opposition being opposed to same sex marriage and government members having a conscience vote, federal legislation seems unlikely to succeed, but it could be successful at state level. Whether this would withstand a High Court Challenge seems doubtful, but if it is enacted it could cost a great deal of time and money to have it thrown out.

Surrogacy, has been presented as a means 'to assist people to realise their dreams of making a family'. But, as I pointed out in the *Messenger* of April 2011, the statistics show that the annual number of Tasmanian couples likely to want to use a surrogate mother on genuine medical grounds will probably be countable on the fingers of one hand. If it is made available to all, it is likely to be used mostly by same sex couples to acquire the children that nature has denied them.

In the April 2011 *Messenger*, I referred to the current requirement for careful assessment of would-be adoptive parents. However, we have since been contacted about a proposal originally floated in 2003 to amend the Adoption Act to allow same sex couples to adopt an 'unknown child', as distinct from one with a family

connection. If this happens, adoption authorities will come under pressure to give same sex couples equally favourable consideration, regardless of what serves the child's best interests.

I have responded to these issues on behalf of Tasmanian Baptists, but it must be remembered that one letter or submission representing a thousand people is given less weight by the decision makers than a hundred or perhaps even ten contacts from individuals. It is therefore vital for individual Christians to contact their parliamentary representatives, especially their Legislative Councillors, and voice their opposition in moderate and thoughtful language. That is where you can play your part. I have provided an updated list of contact details to assist in this task.

You may choose to express in your own language some of the following arguments against these developments.

SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST RE-DEFINING MARRIAGE

- Marriage is much more than a declaration of commitment between two people. It is a social institution that reflects the natural complementarity of a man and a woman.
- As currently defined, it has served us well for centuries.
- We should not change something so foundational to our society without good evidence that the change will be will beneficial. That evidence is lacking.
- Relaxing the requirements for marriage would weaken, not strengthen it.
- All have equal access to marriage under current law, but that doesn't mean we may call all or

any relationships marriage. We can no more marry minors, close relatives or those already married than others of the same sex.

- If the current definition is relaxed in the name of 'equality', there is no logical reason why we should not recognise other relationships as marriage, as polyamorists are already seeking.
- If the definition is changed, it is changed for everyone, not just same sex couples. That would be an injustice for millions of couples who would have the meaning of their marriages changed to something that they never intended.
- Despite claims to the contrary, there is good evidence that children do best when raised by their biological parents, especially if those parents are married. This is not possible with same sex marriages.

SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST PERMITTING SURROGACY FOR SAME SEX COUPLES

- Children are not property to which everyone has a right, but a privilege and a responsibility that is only granted to some.
- There may be up to eight adults directly connected to a child brought into being by the use of artificial reproductive technology involving surrogacy. We should be very cautious about permitting something with such huge potential for conflict and hurt.
- Not having a live-in, identifiable father and mother can be a great source of distress and genetic confusion to the children involved.
- The legitimate need for surrogacy to help childless heterosexual couples is minimal. It is most likely to be used by same sex couples as a means of circumventing nature's requirement for a father and a mother.

SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST PERMITTING 'UNKNOWN CHILD' SAME SEX ADOPTION OF

- Adoption is intended to provide parents for children, not children for would-be parents. The interests of the child must remain paramount.
- If a child's biological parents are unable or unwilling to care for that child, then its future interests are best served by it being placed with a heterosexual married couple.
- Unknown child adoptions are so rare that there are sufficient heterosexual would-be parents to ensure a good family environment for all adopted children.
- Same sex adoption would be used by couples to satisfy their own desires for children and circumvent nature's requirement for each child to have a father and a mother.

In summary, it is in the best interests of our community that we do all that we can to strengthen traditional concepts of marriage and family that have served us so well, whereas all these moves would only serve to continue the process of undermining them.

The most immediate concern is the same sex marriage proposal, although if this gets through it will undoubtedly be used to promote same sex surrogacy and adoption on the grounds that these entitlements should come with the recognition of a same sex 'marriage'.

Contact details for Tasmanian parliamentarians are on the www.parliament.tas.gov.au website, and electorate office details are in the phone books, but I have attached a list of Legislative Councillors' email addresses to facilitate contact. Alternatively, letters can be mailed to the member c/o Parliament house Hobart 7000. In general, a letter will have more impact than an email and a personal visit more than a letter.

rosemary.armitage@parliament.tas.gov.au (Launceston)

ivan.dean@parliament.tas.gov.au (Windermere)

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adriana.taylor@parliament.tas.gov.au (Elwick)

rob.valentine@parliament.tas.gov.au (Hobart)

jim.wilkinson@parliament.tas.gov.au (Nelson)

I appreciate that, with other issues such as euthanasia also on the agenda, we are being called on to speak up more frequently, but if we do not do so then others who don't share our Christian view of God's intentions for our society will hold sway.

I will be overseas between 3rd September and 21st October, but have done what I can before leaving to ensure that our voice is heard. If there is an important need for anyone to contact me I can be reached at eric.lockett@exemail.com.au.

Eric Lockett