

6 August 2015
Prime Minister Tony Abbott
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Prime Minister

Re: Quaker support for marriage equality

Quakers have developed ongoing commitments to *testimonies* which invite our active engagement in daily life, including testimonies on peace, justice and equality. Our views on marriage arise out of the testimony on equality and justice.

Quakers regard marriage and commitment as a fundamentally spiritual matter. A founding Quaker, George Fox, said in 1669: *For the right joining of marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests' or magistrates'; for it is God's ordinance, not man's; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together: for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses.* Quaker marriage has therefore meant that the couple declare their vows before God and before Friends in a special Meeting for Worship for Marriage.

In recent years, as a result of our consistently held belief in the equal worth of all people, Australian Quakers have recognised that committed, same-sex relationships are as valuable as other committed and loving relationships. We have celebrated same-sex commitment ceremonies within our Meetings. While outwardly similar to Quaker marriage, these ceremonies do not have legal standing in Australia because the *Marriage Act (1961)* currently only recognises the union between a man and a woman as a valid legal marriage.

After many years of careful and at times painful discussion and deep division, Australian Quakers gathered for Yearly Meeting 2010 agreed to the following statement:

Australia Yearly Meeting has agreed to treat all requests for celebration of marriage within our Meetings in accordance with Friends' usages, regardless of the sexual orientation or gender of each of the partners. Where marriages are not able to be legally recognised, Friends celebrate the spiritual aspects of the wedding ceremony. Australia Yearly Meeting hopes that the law relating to marriage will be amended to allow Regional meetings to support all couples to full and equal recognition of their marriages. [Handbook of Practice and Procedure (6th edition, 2011)]

We are aware that some other denominations oppose making marriage available to same-sex couples, but ask you to note that those views are not representative of all Christians in Australia. We hope that a Bill to amend the *Marriage Act* to allow for same-sex marriage will be tabled in Parliament this year, and that such a Bill will contain provisions to enable all religious bodies to observe their values with respect to marriage rites.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julian Robertson".

Presiding Clerk, Australia Yearly Meeting

Cc: Attorney-General George Brandis; Member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch; Member for Brisbane Teresa Gambaro

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