

I am writing to you as a migrant, a proud citizen of Australia, a Christian, and a sexologist who writes and speaks throughout Australia on Christianity and sexuality.

My family and I migrated here because Australia was, at the time, a country of freedom and safety – significantly freer and safer, at the time, than our country of birth, Sri Lanka.

As you will realise, as a Christian, I do not think redefining marriage to include the union of two people of the same sex will be good for individuals, families, or Australian society generally. We now know that the majority of Australians think differently to me on this. I accept that as a social fact. I also accept that the law has been changed.

My question to you is: *How will you protect the freedoms and safety of people like me, who find ourselves having to conscientiously object to a significant provision of Australian law?*

I am not advocating that we protect homophobia or transphobia. I was director of an international graduate program in sexual health at the University of Sydney for eight years prior to my retirement in 2012. Through research, and personal contacts with my students and colleagues in the sexual health profession both in Australia and internationally, I have come to understand the pain and harm homophobia and transphobia can cause sexual minorities. As a member of a minority ethnic group in Australia I am well aware of bullying harassment and minority stress.

However, affirming the heterosexual nature of marriage is not the same as hating sexual minorities. In fact, the equation of the two is one of the consequences that was consistently raised by the 'vote no' campaign. We, who hold to a traditional, heterosexual view of marriage are worried that same-sex marriage will be used as a weapon to intimidate, silence, and vilify us.

Laws shape society and social expectations – and it is right that they do. But this means that as soon as the Marriage Act is reworded, future laws and interpretations of these laws, and future social norms, will all be defined by this wording. In order to protect the kind of freedom and safety that attracted me, my family, and many other immigrants, to Australia, any change to the marriage act must be matched by strong protections of the freedoms of speech and conscience of those who dissent from this change. These kinds of strong protections can be a good expression of genuine tolerance and pluralism. They can express a healthy balancing between freedoms of sexual expression, religious expression, and conscience that can advance the kind of freedom and safety that attracted me, and my family, to Australia in the first place.

I am aware of the protection afforded to clergy who perform weddings. However, I am not a minister of religion, therefore will not be protected by this. The overwhelming majority of the 5 million Australians who voted against same sex marriage are not clergy, and therefore are outside the scope of this limited protection.

As I have travelled and spoken about sexuality at churches across Australia, people have raised with me various concerns regarding the possible legalisation of same-sex marriage. Those concerns fall into three broad areas:

1. Will Australians be guaranteed freedom to continue teaching and explaining the traditional, heterosexual view of marriage and sexuality, not only in a Christian church setting but also in public places, including our universities?
2. Will religious schools maintain the freedom to teach and affirm the traditional, heterosexual view of marriage?
3. Will our children in state schools have liberty to express a traditional, heterosexual view of marriage? If they are bullied for doing so, will the school protect them? Will parents have freedom to opt children out of lessons that advocate views of marriage and sexuality that contravene their religious convictions? Or will those lessons become a form of compulsory social indoctrination?

I respectfully place these issues before you.

All of these are directly relevant to me personally. I have already had three incidents of direct persecution for my teaching in Christian schools and churches.

1. In May this year, I had a young man follow me through Westfield Parramatta, screaming abuse, pointing at me, and vilifying me as being homophobic. That event was of course personally traumatic. I have made a complaint to the police against this person. This event forced me to withdraw from a social group this person is associated with. Having to withdraw from that social group has led to me losing contact with my friends from that social group. None of those friends ever vilified me in this way. But because I had to withdraw from that social group for my personal safety, I do not see them anymore.
2. In June, I was subject to a complaint made to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Sydney, requesting that my honorary position with the institution should be terminated because of my Christian teaching. That complaint has been dismissed.
3. Also in June, I was subject to a complaint, similar to the above, to the Society of Australian Sexologists, requesting that my honorary life membership, which was awarded by them in 2010 for services to the profession, especially in my role as director of an international award winning graduate sexual health program at the University of Sydney, should be withdrawn, because of my Christian teaching. That complaint remains outstanding.

I am concerned that this kind of intimidation and vilification will be validated, and increase, not just against me, but against others who seek to publicly affirm the goodness of traditional, heterosexual marriage.

I am seventy years old. My heart aches for the future of our great nation, and the plight of the generations to follow who do not fit into the new morality.

Thank you for reading this. I wish you well in pursuing the good for all Australians.

████████████████████