

# Josh Withers

## Marriage Celebrant

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I, Josh Withers, Commonwealth Marriage Celebrant, write to express my support for Marriage Equality.

Australian celebrants are privileged to share in a unique celebration of love when couples make formal and legal commitments to each other. We can see that the joy of the moment extends far beyond the couple making the commitment and also includes their families, friends and communities.

In contemporary Australia, however, some couples are denied the opportunity to share the joy of this moment. As marriage equality is not recognised, couples in same-sex relationships do not enjoy the same rights and are not treated with the same dignity as other Australians.

As a celebrant, I believe I have an important role to play in promoting inclusion and tolerance. I support diversity in society and recognise the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) Australians to marry. Denying celebrants the ability to marry same-sex couples also impinges on our individual freedom.

I believe the rights and liberties of all individuals are sacrosanct. They are essential in the creation of a healthy, harmonious and open society. An equitable society, free of discrimination, allows all members to function at their best. Legalised discrimination in one area allows discrimination to flourish in all areas.

Australia is a robust democracy with a proud history of social reform. This should continue, with all citizens being treated equally, including those who are currently excluded from the institution of marriage.

Australians are increasingly supportive of marriage equality, with a recent Crosby Textor survey showing seventy-two percent of Australians are in favour of same sex couples marrying. This overwhelming level of support should be reflected with legal change.

Globally, nineteen countries have passed laws to allow same sex marriage, including countries that are culturally similar to ours such as New Zealand and Great Britain. These countries passed this important reform with a lower level of public support for marriage equality than exists in Australia right now. In the United States, thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia have legalised same sex marriage.

On May 22nd, the Republic of Ireland held a referendum to sanction same sex marriage. A Yes vote was supported by the Government, all major political parties and the voters themselves.

In June of this year, the U.S. Supreme court is likely to return a judgement in favour of legalising same-sex marriage across that nation.

These two events will see Australia isolated amongst countries where English is spoken as a first language as the last nation to recognise equal marriage rights.

Marriage is a celebration that joins people together and denying same-sex couples this opportunity limits us as a society. Equal Marriage is the only truly fair. It will create a climate where the bonds of love and commitment are recognised equally and celebrated widely.

The ability to make equal commitments is fair and just. Discrimination is not.

Yours faithfully,



Josh Withers, Commonwealth Marriage Celebrant