



## OPINION PIECE

### **THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION MEMBER FOR CORIO**

#### **NOW IS THE TIME TO REJECT INEQUALITY**

Last week, the people of Ireland voted overwhelmingly in favour of granting same sex couples the right to get married. Imagine that, Catholic Ireland, a country that only decriminalized homosexuality 22 years ago has now joined the growing ranks of other nations to afford same sex couples this equality.

It did so, by giving its people a say through a referendum on the issue and the response from the Irish community was a resounding yes in favour of same sex marriage.

The example of Ireland is a fine demonstration of changing attitudes on marriage equality. More and more people are seeing this as not just some fringe issue but, one that actually casts a significant number of Australians into a lesser category.

For me, the starkness of that inequality is clear at our family gatherings with my wife's parents – being in a certified committed relationship with their daughter, I am their son-in-law. But as it stands now the man who is in a committed relationship with their son can never move beyond the 'partner' tag. A choice many heterosexual couples are happy with but something he is limited to.

Around that table we are all equal and treated with the same respect and love from my wife's family – there is no question of that but beyond the house gates there is an inequality that we simply must address. And that time is now.

On my side of politics, my good mates Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen and Member for Chieffly Ed Husic are two of a growing number of MPs that have shifted their view and are now in favour of marriage equality.

On the Liberal side, leadership aspirant Malcolm Turnbull and rising star Kelly O'Dwyer – the Member for Higgins are also both on the record in supporting same sex marriage.

Privately, a great many more Liberals support marriage equality but refuse to say so publicly.

This is in part because Tony Abbott won't afford them the dignity to have a say about this matter of great public importance.

It is a pity the Member for Corangamite who has been asked countless times for her stance on marriage equality – including by this paper – refuses to make her position public.

I strongly believe her fear in being upfront with the people of our city underestimates community sentiment on this issue of fairness.

Clearly there will be people from both sides of politics that don't support same sex marriage for a variety of reasons. I absolutely respect them. And in the same breathe as supporting marriage equality it is essential we affirm our commitment to religious freedom.

I have met with people concerned about same sex marriage and while we disagree on the fundamental question of marriage equality, we have been able to debate the issue with respect and courtesy.

That the Member for Corangamite has opted to completely abandon the debate and duck for cover is a shame.

Leadership takes courage, and that means standing up for your beliefs.

On Monday, Labor leader Bill Shorten will move a Private Members Bill in the House of Representatives to finally bring about marriage equality in Australia.

This will challenge the deeply held personal beliefs of MPs and Senators on both sides of politics.

Labor MPs will have the freedom to vote their conscience – a freedom Tony Abbott is currently denying his party.