

## **Same Sex Marriage-Chris Hayes MP**

**Federal Member for Fowler, Chief Opposition Whip**

**3 October 2017**

When same sex marriage was last debated in the Parliament and Members were offered a conscience vote, it was under a Labor Government in 2012. I voted to retain the traditional union of marriage.

I considered a conscience vote to be just that. It is not a “free-for-all”, a poll driven contest or a vote influenced by focus group research. I voted in accordance with what I believe and that is marriage is a union between a man and woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

I have been accused of not having an open mind on this matter and some have said that I am just doing the bidding of the Church. I am not sure how you can have an open mind when it comes to the matter of personal beliefs. If your beliefs are so flexible and easily swayed by others, maybe it says more about the person than the beliefs they hold.

In fairness, I should declare that I am a Catholic and grew up in a religious household. I admit my background probably accounts in part, for my social conservatism.

I have always felt it is better for children growing up with the love and support of a mother and father. However, as a Member of Parliament, I am only too familiar with the levels of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect that is occurring in our so called nuclear families. I have certainly refined my view in this regard and now believe children simply need the unconditional love and care of parents, living in a safe environment. I know enough same sex couples to understand their genuine desire to have children and for those who already have children, I have seen the love and care as you would ordinarily expect from loving parents. I would never cast aspersions on them, their families, or belittle the love they share.

I appreciate the fears of religious institutions that enacting same sex marriage could impact on religious freedoms, teaching of doctrine, and the functioning of faith based organisations such as schools, aged care and welfare agencies. These are legitimate concerns and matters I believe have to be addressed in order to ensure laws do not act to violate one's genuinely held beliefs and conscience.

However, it is not just the issue of same sex marriage that may impinge on religious freedom. Therefore, I believe steps should be taken to protect religious liberty.

Given that the Government has committed us to a nation-wide survey on same sex marriage, I will have regard to the views of the community. While my personal views remain constant, I will not disregard the results of the ABS survey, in other words, should it be a "yes" result, I will not act to frustrate or delay the passage of legislation to give effect to the community's decision.

While I am not campaigning in this matter, I encourage everyone to exercise common sense and decency. Nothing should be said or done that is hurtful to fellow Australians.