

## Written evidence from Dr Stephen Morris [HAB0337]

I am replying to this consultation in a personal capacity. I am interested in the subject as a citizen and, in particular, as a Christian.

To the very best of my knowledge, no serious evidence has ever been produced to contradict the fact that families are most stable, and children have the best outcomes, when the family is built around a heterosexual married couple.

The key difference between a married couple and cohabiting couple is that married couples have made solemn public promises to one another, that they will stick with the other person and remain faithful to them. Now we all know that not all couples keep these promises and, sadly, marriages break up for all sorts of reasons. Nevertheless, a very high proportion do keep those promises.

Therefore it would be wrong – and detrimental to the stability of society as a whole – to discourage people from making such promises to one another.

At the moment, the State quite rightly recognises<sup>1</sup> the reality and the importance of marriage by providing benefits such as transferability of tax allowances and streamlined inheritance rules. The definition of marriage is clear, and if it's true (as is often claimed) that people are confused about this - and mistakenly believe that cohabiting is equivalent to marriage and brings similar benefits - then surely this is a matter of education.

I cannot think of another area of life where the appropriate response to people's misapprehension of reality is to try to mould reality to fit their understanding of it.

It is a great thing about this country that any two people who are able to get married and meet the bare minimum requirements of being (a) of age and (b) not already married to someone else, may do so. There are no barriers of age, class, race, religion, or anything else to prevent them from making their public promises to one another, in a secular setting if they so choose, and from that point being married and enjoying all the benefits.

If people choose to cohabit instead, then that is a choice that they have made. The State should honour people's choices, and not treat them exactly as it would if they had made a different choice.

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<sup>1</sup> Note, I use the word 'recognises' in its proper sense. Marriage, as a concept, isn't something that the State brings into being: rather, it's something that pre-exists the State, and the State's role is to acknowledge and support it. Hence my own attitude to 'same-sex marriage' is not so much that I oppose it, as that I don't believe it exists. One can't oppose something that doesn't exist. I do in fact oppose the State's pretending that it does, but that's another topic...