

# **ATTACHMENT TO AGENDA ITEM**

**Ordinary Meeting  
19 September 2017**

**Agenda Item 17 - Urgent and Other Business**

**Attachment 1 – Tabled Letter ..... 268**

Dear Fern,

We're a week in to the Marriage Survey and I'm sure everyone is over it.

As someone who's been out since 2012 I've had a number of years now to become more confident and comfortable with my sexuality and who I am as a person. I enjoy a lot of support from my family, friends and work colleagues. I honestly can't remember being confronted outwardly with opposition to me being gay; that is, no one has verbally or physically attacked me in the street because I'm gay.

Sure, I've had a couple of letters sent to my home wanting to save me from the eternal fires of damnation following a letter I wrote to the paper but no one (that I can remember) has actually come up to me and expressed their disapproval of who I am. In the grand scheme of things I'm doing pretty well. I came out late and escaped a lot of the negativity of old. I have a supportive social group, I'm well connected in the community and I've reached the point in my journey where I'm "more than" my sexuality. Compared to a lot of my LGBTI peers I've had an easy journey and I'm doing well because of it.

But I'm struggling.

The last week has been tough. For many weeks the focus in my 'gay friend group' has been the postal survey. I was firmly of the opinion that it didn't matter because it wasn't compulsory (you don't have to vote), it wasn't binding (the politicians don't need to listen to the outcome), and it won't actually take anything away from us (we already don't have marriage). It's a pretty pointless exercise really. But my friends were way more stressed and focused on it but I was sailing through.

Earlier this week though I came home and found my survey vote in my letterbox. "Have your say" it proudly proclaimed on the back. This was where I stopped sailing. Here was a letter, sent to millions of people in my country, inviting them to voice their opinion of me. My government says that their opinion of me is important, should be heard and recorded, and will spend at least \$122,000,000 garnering those opinions. Opinions of me and many of my friends.

Some of these opinions are apathetic; "I don't care what they do" and "Doesn't affect me" are common responses that I've seen. Some of them however are far worse, suggesting that we're all paedophiles and want to mandate gay marriage upon unsuspecting straight people. "Think of the children" they cry, like we aren't worthy of children or 'good enough' to have them. I'm sure you know the sort of thing that's been blamed on the gays. I know there's one chap locally that has written a book, and he kindly dropped it into my workplace a couple of years ago for us to have a read. One of the lines read "Homosexuals are like white ants, working behind closed doors to destroy the fabric of society".

I sometimes can't quickly remember what day it is or other little things in day-to-day life but opinions likening me to a white ant destroying society, and peoples reactions to them, I remember. Clearly.

His opinion, according to my government, is worth listening to. He gets a "Have your say" envelope too.

For many years I monitored closely peoples reactions to these topics. Termed "Heterosexuality Surveillance" by an LGBTI advocate I know, I watched how people behaved and reacted to topics related to sexuality and tried my hardest to mimic them as part of my heterosexual facade. For the most part I succeeded and was able to "play it straight" until I came out at age 27. But those learned habits of heterosexuality surveillance, honed from age 13 through 27, are hard to stop.

So when I see opinions of me and whom I am thrown around in public, on social media, or the news, I look around and watch. It's automatic now. Whatever the opinion is, good or bad, I watch for their reaction. Will they agree that I'm a white ant destroying society? Will they turn a blind eye? Will they stand up for me? Will they "Have their say" as our government so eloquently invites them to do?

Although I'm struggling with the immense focus put on me and my community at the moment I have the strength and support of my friends and family to withstand the scrutiny. The numerous opinions of random people that don't know me or who I am but are invited to "Have their say" regardless. At this point in my journey I have the strength to get through this.

Many LGBTI people, including young people, do not have that strength or supportive social community. Many of them are on their own.

Regardless of their age, many aren't as lucky as I am to have been involved with a supportive and strong LGBTI community. Shepparton, despite what some may think, is one of the best resourced regional areas in the state to be gay. We have numerous LGBTI groups supporting youth, adults, parents and friends, and school based inclusive policy development. Despite these groups and support professionals there's members of the local community that aren't yet able to be themselves.

These people are facing the same scrutiny that I am. If I'm struggling, how are they coping?

This is where the Allies come in. The people that aren't gay, lesbian, bi or part of the 'queer community' but they support us anyway. Sometimes in a big way. Sometimes in a small way. It doesn't matter how big or small because we're always watching for it - it's that habit we've practiced for so long. That the show of support is coming from someone that doesn't have a vested interest in the outcome but is showing it because they believe it is right - it means so much more.

In particular, the businesses that have rainbow posters in their windows and particularly to those who have had the odd letter of negative feedback because of their supportive stance but continue to display the posters. When you're looking for the slightest glimmer of support in a time where everyone's "having their say" on you and who you are, this sort of support is incredibly important. Driving down Wyndham Street or Fryers Street and seeing even one rainbow flag sends a deafeningly loud message to the person that needs support during the two month long period of postal survey scrutiny. I can't underscore how important it is to have visually proud supporters of the gay community during this time.

This of course includes the support provided to us by our local council. GSCC has supported us for many years in a number of ways, particularly through grants for OUTintheOPEN and more recently the motion for supporting marriage equality. Many at the time said that marriage equality was not an issue for council to have an opinion or stance on, as marriage is a federal issue. They're correct that it's a federal issue however they fail to acknowledge the value of that support. To have your local council vocally support marriage equality and as an extension you, as a person, means a lot. Seeing the GSCC logo in the newspaper in an advertisement for marriage equality means that despite the negativity surrounding this postal survey our council is willing to get behind us and say "We think you're worth it". That means a lot.

Please don't underestimate the value that GSCC's support provides to the wellbeing of our local LGBTI community. It is invaluable, particularly during the next couple of months when 'who we are' is up for public discussion.

I know that you have put a lot of time and work into obtaining that motion of support and the ongoing support that our council provides and I wanted to say that it is very much appreciated by myself and the rest of our community.

Thank you Fern,

Kieran Murphy