

Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby



Annual
Report,
2006

Co-Convenors Reports

Female Co-Convenors Report

The last year has been a busy one. I am pleased to report that despite the late nights and endless urgent, panicky phone calls re a lobby 'crisis', I am still passionate about social justice and law reform for LGBTIQ Victorians – and why wouldn't I be? I have had the opportunity to work with a fantastic team of committed, concerned individuals, and have shared and gained skills a-plenty from the lobby! And so, I would like to take this opportunity to share a few highlights over the last year.

My first public speak on behalf of the lobby was a rally for International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2005 - I remember sharing the stage with activists from different groups– greenies, socialists, indigenous speakers, union representatives – and the similar struggle that we share is what has inspired and carried me this year. Especially when dealing with politicians, government workers, and even people within our community. (A forum in which I was called a 'liberal fascist conservative' springs to mind, the reason being I was putting forward the VGLRL stance on relationship recognition and it was deemed to be heterosexist and conservative from members within our community). However, for me, criticism from within our community has reaffirmed the diversity of the LGBTIQ community itself, and how we can not speak for all of the community but only for those who join us, support us and elect us to represent them in our dealings with all levels of government for law reform and social change.

In terms of 'goals' or what I might be smiling about: a project this year was to see the *Over the Rainbow* publication updated and ready for distribution. I can report that it is in its final stages and hopefully once that is done, we can update the web version of *Over the Rainbow* - a comprehensive range of information about the laws that effects LGBTIQ Victorians in just one click ☺

Working with the Victorian Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLLOs) this year has been challenging - coming from a community legal background and a (healthy) distrust of the police has meant I had to work through my fears/dislike and I can say with confidence that it is cops like Scott who have made me re-think some of my former views! I do now believe that community policing can benefit our community, although I still find red tape incredibly frustrating!

Giving evidence with Gerard at the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Same Sex-Same Entitlements Inquiry* was yet another chance for me to use the skills I use in my 'day job' and one of the perks of my involvement in the VGLRL for me! Gerard has covered the inquiry in his report so I wont repeat self here.

I have enjoyed the camaraderie and relationships that develop from the lobby. The respect and admiration that I have for the management committee members, from working groups, and every single member that contributes whether just by joining or by getting involved as a volunteer– remains just as strong today a year after being female co-

convenor. I do not believe for a second that the VGLRL would have been as strong as it is now if it wasn't for every volunteers efforts, so I end my report with a thank you to every single one of you.

Thank you,

Aly M
Female Co-convenor 2006

Male Co-convenor's Report

It has been a privilege to be gay coconvenor of the lobby in 2006. From the committee of management, to our extensive network of volunteers, to our many supporters in the GLBTIQ and broader communities, we have worked hard and worked smart to defend and extend our rights.

Early in the year, the committee engaged in a strategic planning process to examine our mission, vision and values; and our organisational structures. The constitutional changes that you will consider tonight flow from that process.

On the policy front, we have gone from strength to strength. Our Policy Working Group has developed carefully considered policies in our major state and national areas of interest, to complement policies already existing in areas such as access to assisted reproductive technology. These policies – and in particular our policy on same-sex relationship recognition - have had a substantial impact on public debate and decision-making in Victoria.

Yet policy development is but one part of our work. During the year, we have consolidated and built our database of 1500 individual and organisational contacts, which enables us to quickly get our message out to a wide audience. This year, our Communications Working Group supplemented our regular e-mail bulletin with the printed *Outcomes* newsletter, which we plan to make a regular event. During the year, we increased our membership and put in place systems to welcome, induct and monitor new volunteers. Our Events Working Group also facilitated and supported several important public events, such as the Midsumma Festival, the Jimmy Somerville concert and a relationship recognition debate at the Melbourne Queer Film Festival.

The effectiveness of our campaigning relies heavily on people who write letters to newspapers, call up talkback radio, visit and write to their members of Parliament and indeed talk about our human rights to family, friends and workmates. I am particularly proud that this year we have increased our capability to track and support these essential people.

Just how effectively these three levels of activity came together was shown by the campaign we mounted around the *ACT Civil Union Act*. Although the Governor General struck down the Act – denying Territorian couples an alternative to marriage - there is no doubt that in Victoria we comprehensively won the battle for public opinion, exposed out extremist opponents as bereft of ideas, significantly increased the lobby's profile and sent a clear message to the Victorian State Government that there is considerable political support for civil unions. They also came together when our Equal Love Working Group

organised the hugely successful National Day of Action, building participation threefold over 2005. These are great examples of community campaigning at its best.

Although we have not yet been able to convince the State Government to recognise our relationships with registration and celebration, we have done a great deal of work behind the scenes and are confident it will bear fruit in due course.

My heartfelt thanks to the committee, to all our volunteers and to our supporters in the GLBTIQ and broader communities. Our community has an impressive percentage of intelligent and committed people who give enormously of themselves to support our many community groups. To those who have chosen to do so with the Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby I say again, thank you. It is an honour and a privilege to work with you.

Ron Thiele

(Gay) Coconvenor

Policy Working Group Report

The Policy Working Group researches, develops and proposes policy on a range of issues faced by the GLBTI community. We focus on identifying areas of discrimination against gay men and lesbians and aim to bring these to the attention of our community, the government and the wider public. In the past 12 months, we have worked on the following areas.

Relationship recognition

- we developed a discussion paper on **state-based relationship recognition**. The paper explains why the LGBTIQ community needs relationship recognition, the difference between registration and civil unions, and the situation around Australia and overseas. The PWG has presented the paper to a number of state parliamentarians and the Attorney-General's Advisory Committee on Gay and Lesbian Issues.

Human rights charter

- we were part of the campaign to establish the landmark **Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities**. The Charter begins a process of creating a human rights culture in Victoria, and hence a culture that rejects homophobia. It means that the language of human rights, of respect for the inherent dignity for every person, will become part of our government policy, and in due course practice, is done in Victoria.

Write to your schools campaign

- we helped create a campaign to better support Victorian schools, including developing curriculum and other school services that address homophobia and the wellbeing of same-sex attracted and transgender youth. The **Write to you**

Schools campaign, which encouraged people to audit their school for diversity and action to prevent homophobia and gender stereotyping. The campaign also encouraged people to display positive posters around their school.

Anti-vilification and anti-violence policies

- we have developed **anti-vilification and anti-violence policies** as part of our priority to address harassment and violence against LGBTIQ people. We have also participated in a joint Ministerial Advisory Committee project to review the most appropriate legislative and educational approaches to homophobic harassment in Victoria.

HREOC inquiry

- we participated in this important **inquiry into discrimination against same-sex couples in relation to workplace and financial benefits**. We provided the inquiry with a submission detailing the effect of discrimination in federal legislation on same-sex couples. We also presented to the inquiry at the public hearings in Melbourne.

Sexuality discrimination

- we provided feedback to the Federal ALP on draft Sexuality Discrimination Bill. We recommended a number of amendments to ensure that there is robust anti-discrimination law on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

We welcome volunteers to attend our meetings, which are held on the second Monday of each month at the British Crown Hotel, Smith Street, Collingwood. I'd like to thank everyone who has been involved in the PWG this year, and we look forward to a fruitful year ahead.

Gerard Brody
Policy Working Group convenor

Women's Forum

In response to a need identified in the Lobby's "Not Yet Equal" report, committee member Barbary Clarke produced a submission to the Reichstein Foundation for a study regarding lesbian women and access to health services titled Raising L. This forum is to be undertaken as an alliance with Matrix Guild. Forming the alliance with Matrix Guild will allow for the combined expertise and missions of both groups, and to take advantages of Matrix Guild's charitable status. Matrix Guild's submission to the Reichstein Foundation took place in time for the final round of submissions to the Foundation for 2006. It is planned that the submission by Barbary will take place in the next round so as to allow the feedback from the Matrix Guild's submission to enhance

this submission. To support this submission, any letters of recommendation from other community groups would be most welcome.

Events Working Group

While the Events Working Group has since been discontinued as part of the Lobby's Strategic Direction process, major undertakings of the Working Group included:

- Pride March
- Midsumma Presence
- Jimmy Sommerville Concert
- Relationship Recognition Debate as part of Queer Film Festival

While filling in as acting Working Group Convenor, Lee provided exceptional energy and direction to ensure that the above events were a success and opportunity to promote the Lobby.

Equal Love Working Group

Fertility Access Rights

Since October last year the Fertility Access Rights Lobby has continued to work across to two key areas: supporting the work of the Love Makes A Family (LMAF) campaign and organising the Rainbow Families 3 (RF3) conference.

The end of an era & a new beginning.

The Fertility Access Rights Lobby has been a working group of the Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby since 2001. The relationship with the Lobby has been a supportive and vital one, providing both legitimacy and political clout as required during the past 5 years. Effectively the creation of the new Council has dissolved the Fertility Access Rights Lobby and with it, FAR's place as a working group of the VGLRL. The aims of FAR will be included within the creation of the new Council constitution and mission statement to be developed in the coming year.

The following motion to establish the Rainbow Families Council of Victoria was passed unanimously at a meeting of 34 Rainbow Families 3 Conference participants on Sunday 17 September 2006:

“That the Rainbow Families Council of Victoria proposal as amended and discussed on Sunday 17 September 2006 at the Rainbow Families 3 conference be adopted”

Information on the Council and how to get involved will soon be available on the VGLRL, Love Makes A Family and Rainbow Families websites.

The year in review.

FAR has continued to advocate on behalf of the parenting and prospective parenting communities including:

- LMAF held a Surrogacy Community forum - December 2005.
- FAR, LMAF & VGLRL submissions to the Victorian Law Reform Commission Position Paper 3 Surrogacy - January 2005.
- Participation on the Victorian Law Reform Commission roundtables February 2006.
- Rainbow Families Picnic Day - the first ever as part of Midsumma 2006 - over 125 children, parents and families members attended the day at Skinners playground in South Melbourne - January 2006.
- Submission to the HREOC Same Sex-Same Entitlements Enquiry - May 2006.
- Contributing to and researching resources for the Gay & Lesbian Health Victoria Website Clearinghouse - ongoing www.glhv.org.au

- Rainbow Families 3 Conference - over 250 registrations, workshops, plenary presentations, a cultural program and active kids club - September 16 & 17 2006.
- Development of the Rainbow Families website - a resource for rainbow families conference papers and reports, information and groups – ongoing www.rainbowfamilies.org.au

Rainbow Families award

Felicity Marlowe was awarded the second Rainbow Families award at the RF3 conference in recognition of her outstanding commitment to the rainbow families of Victoria.

Many thanks to.

- The VGLRL Committee of Management and the members of the Policy Working Group.
- Dr Ruth McNair founder of FAR and convenor 1999 to 2004.
- The many wonderful people who contributed to the work of FAR over the years including Janet Jukes, Sarah Marlowe, Kris Walker, Meg Gulbin, Elisabeth Speller, Di Hall and Liz Short.
- The Rainbow Families 3 conference committee members: Amelia Basset (co-chair), Sue West, Sam Walsh, Rhonda Brown, Jade Blakarly, Kath Brackett, Camille Foley, Jamie Magel and Jayne Arlett.

Felicity Marlowe

FAR Convenor 2004 - 2006

LMAF Coordinator – www.lovemakesafamilyaustralia.org

Alliance Working Group

Alliance Working Group was headed by Aron Paul for the initial part of the year prior to his resignation for personal reasons. Activities undertaken included the attendance at Australian Coalition for Equality. Position of Alliance Working Group convenor was assumed by Stephen in June. Works to date have included:

- Determining a means to attract interested individuals who may have been active in student activism activities; and maintaining their interest and activity in Lobby activities after their completion of schooling
- Reviewing like minded groups who it may be possible to form alliances from those who submitted submissions to the HREOC Inquiry. Over 100 potential groups have been identified

- Intention to form an Alliances Working Group was announced at September committee meeting

Secretary's Report

Given the activities of the Working Groups as detailed above, monthly committee meetings were insufficient to accommodate the works of the Committee. David Johnston-Bell undertook an enormous task of compiling the Strategic Direction document, which provided the opportunity to review the activities and undertakings of the Lobby to ensure that these were aligned to the needs and expectations of our members. This document formed the basis of extensive discussions at three committee meetings. Given the volume of discussion, an additional meeting was on Sunday 26th March. This allowed extensive discussion on issues including:

- Mission, Vision & Values
- Lobby Branding
- Mission Statement
- Vision

The constitutional changes proposed are noted for in the agenda for this Annual General Meeting and to be voted on at this event.

Our annual membership renewals were issued in August, and a strong response from members has seen approximately 120 members renewing to date.