

**A Proposed Model for a
Victorian
Gay and Lesbian
Rights Lobby**

**STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT
AND DISCUSSION PAPER**

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Thanks to all those who have been involved in the steering committee.

Alanna Duffy
Andrew McDonald
Braith Bamkin
Danny Sandor
David Gray
Deborah Dempsey
Dolf Boek
Geoffrey Conaghan
Greg Adkins
Greg Axton
Greg Brown
James Robinson
Janet Jukes
Julie Peters
Max Leorke
Monica Ferrari
Penny Byrne
Peter Di Sciascio
Peter Maroudas
Robert Pearce

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Thanks also to MSO for a community grant to help with advertising for the new Lobby organisation (when it is established).

We are happy to announce that a new lobby group would begin life with some financial support from the remaining GLAD money that has been held in trust for such a group. Thank you to David Owen and the VAC/GMHC and the ALSO Foundation for their confidence in us.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. A public meeting held in Melbourne in May 1997 identified the need for a rights lobby to represent the interests of the Lesbian, Gay and Transgender communities.

1.2. A unanimous resolution was passed at the meeting calling for the establishment of a steering committee to establish a proposed model for a Victorian Rights Lobby for Lesbians, Gay men, and Transgender people.

1.3. A steering committee was appointed to research and recommend to a future community meeting an appropriate Lobby structure, legal status, goals and objectives, identify key issues and make direction recommendations.

1.4. The steering committee met on an average of once a fortnight between May and September under the direction of a convenor. Initially starting with around 20 participants, by August around 10 core members remained.

1.5. The steering committee represented a cross section of gay men, lesbians and transgendered people. Committee members were from a range of backgrounds and occupations: students, the disabled, a regional Victorian resident, a hospitality sector worker, health professional, community sector manager, small business operator, media and the legal profession.

1.6. A number of subcommittees operated in between the fortnightly meetings and reported back to the committee on structure, incorporation, membership, and accommodation options.

1.7. A one day workshop to focus on a range of issues was attended by the committee members and a number of additional participants invited along for extra input and perspective. This workshop was facilitated by an independent gay man who was not part of the specific working party processes.

1.8. The Lobby working party was asked to return a list of recommendations to the community at public meeting. This document details those recommendations, the process, issues and discussion which assisted the steering committee arrive at those recommendations.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. The decriminalisation of homosexuality in Victoria in the early 1980s was a major step towards equal rights, opportunities and a freely visible life style for gay men and lesbians.

2.2. Yet it took 15 years to secure limited anti-discrimination protection. It was not until 1995 that anti-discrimination protection was achieved, and then only under the unsatisfactory grounds of “lawful sexual activity”.

2.3. A great deal remains to be achieved in the area of equal rights for gay men and lesbians. A lobby group has been proposed to achieve equality and social justice for gay men and lesbians.

3. THE LOBBY - A POSITION

3.1. The Lobby will represent gay and lesbian interests and work co-operatively and constructively within the political framework and the community at large.

3.2. The Lobby will work with the transgender community on shared issues and should establish a Transgender project within the Lobby to assist the transgender community to establish its own lobby.

3.3. It will achieve its goals through representation, advocacy and working with the media.

3.4. The Lobby will maintain effective relationships with decision makers while at the same time ensuring it assertively works to achieve equality and social justice for lesbians and gay men.

3.1 MISSION

To achieve equality and social justice for lesbians and gay men.

3.2 STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

- **consult with all community sectors**
- **develop common goals and policies among lesbians and gay men**
- **work closely with and support the Transgender community**
- **address legal, social and economic areas of disadvantage and discrimination against gay men and lesbians.**
- **work with other groups where appropriate**
- **work towards equal representation of lesbians and gay men within the Lobby**

3.3 OBJECTS:

- **conduct and disseminate research**
- **develop and implement educative strategies**
- **work at all levels of decision making - government, policy makers, organisations and other representative bodies**
- **monitor, respond to and initiate media**
- **to do such other things as the association may consider to be necessary and desirable to achieve and advance the mission of the association**
- **raise money, employ staff and enter into other financial and legal arrangements as may be appropriate**

4. SOME OF THE KEY ISSUES AND AIMS THE COMMUNITY FACES AT PRESENT INCLUDE:

LEGAL

- the capacity to have our relationships recognised
- next of kin status to same sex couples to ensure equality and social justice at times of bereavement and illness.
- IVF access for lesbians equal to that currently available to heterosexual women
- the removal of exclusions in anti-discrimination legislation which continue discrimination on the grounds of sexuality.

ECONOMIC

- extension of superannuation benefits currently enjoyed by heterosexual couples.
- social security benefits and access to resources not currently extended to gay men and lesbians, their partners or carers.

EMPLOYMENT

- the extension of spousal benefits to same sex couples
- remove ongoing institutionalised workplace discrimination experienced in the armed services, education occupations and the police force.

LIFESTYLE

- public violence and safety in the community
- the suicide rate of gay and lesbian youth
- improved access to resources for rural gay men and lesbians
- acknowledge the breadth and diversity of the community, including the transgendered, elderly, people with disabilities and gays and lesbians from non English speaking backgrounds.

5. KEY ISSUES/RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 COALITION AND CO-OPERATION BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

5.1.1. The steering committee addressed the issue of gay men and lesbians working together. The community has a history of non co-operation based on gender. There are various reasons for this and the working party considered it appropriate to use the Lobby as an opportunity to establish a gay and lesbian rights group which worked actively and constructively in coalition to achieve equality and social justice for lesbians and gay men.

5.1.2. A coalition approach is necessary because any discrimination against gay men or lesbians harms all of us.

5.1.3. The Lobby will involve men and women in all levels of membership, planning, decision making and representation.

5.2 MEMBERSHIP

5.2.1. The steering committee's recommendation is that the Lobby's membership be open to those who subscribe to the Lobby's mission and goals, and therefore membership is not restricted to those identifying as gay men or lesbians.

5.2.2. The Lobby will be managed by a committee of 10. Of these at least 4 will be lesbians and 4 will be gay men. The other 2 positions are untagged.

5.2.3. The committee will appoint 2 co-convenors. One will be a gay man and one will be a lesbian.

5.3 WORKING WITH THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

5.3.1. The Lobby will work with the transgender community on shared issues and will establish a Transgender project within the Lobby to assist the transgender community to establish its own lobby.

5.3.2. The steering committee remain aware that the community meeting proposed to establish a Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Rights Lobby and recommended that a steering committee be formed to make recommendations.

5.3.3. The Lobby's role in relation to gay men, lesbians and the transgendered communities was probably one of the most deeply debated issues and one which took considerable time and energy. The issue was passionately debated by the steering committee and resulted in the resignation of a steering committee member.

5.3.4. The Steering Committee recognised that often the gay and lesbian community tacks on 'Transgender' without any real concern for this community or without allocating resources to address the sometimes different needs of transgendered people. The Steering Committee does not want tokenism to be a factor in the Lobby Group.

5.3.5. The majority of members of the steering committee came to the position that the specific issue is one of sexuality, not gender. The Lobby's focus should be elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. As such, transgendered people who identify as lesbian or gay are to be included at all levels of the Lobby's activities.

5.3.6. The Steering Committee recognises that a Lobby cannot be all things to all people, but must work closely with existing transgender, lesbian and gay lobby organisations.

5.3.7. The recommendation on name and leadership clearly focuses on lesbians and gay men. While membership of the Lobby is open to "those who subscribe to the Lobby's mission and goals", eight out of ten committee positions are reserved for those identifying as gay men or lesbians. The two co-convenor positions are reserved for one lesbian and one gay man.

5.3.8. The position taken by the steering committee was that a Gay and Lesbian Lobby should be focused and driven by the constituency it represents. Its ability to embrace other groups or individuals is achieved through two positions on the committee being “untagged” - ie. not specifically reserved for gay men or lesbians.

5.4 STRUCTURE AND INCORPORATION

5.4.1. The working party has recommended that the Lobby become an Incorporated Association and operate under the rules of the Incorporated Associations Act.

5.4.2. This recommendation is made on the basis of operational efficiency. Incorporated Associations can have members, establish membership fees, receive donations and employ staff.

5.4.3. The Act also specifies a number of activities such as annual general meetings, processes for decision making and rule changing etc which assist to ensure a high degree of accountability.

5.4.4. This structure is useful for a democratic body and the framework is already conveniently laid out. Significantly, an Incorporated Association structure assists an effective lobby group since it allows the group to focus on its purpose rather than being preoccupied with processes.

5.5 COMMUNITY RELEVANCE

5.5.1. The lobby should maintain a high level of community relevance. While it should focus on key issues the Lobby should continually canvas community needs and assess the political landscape.

5.5.2. The Lobby should establish community consultation processes to assist community relevance.

5.5.3. The Lobby should aim to be fluid and avoid having an inflexible agenda which may not be achievable at a particular time.

5.5.4. This will ensure it is focused in its activities and therefore effective in achieving equality and social justice for lesbians and gay men.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

6.1. A Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby be established.

6.2. The Lobby should be established to achieve equality and social justice for lesbians and gay men. Co-operation with other groups is recommended where there is overlap.

6.3. The Lobby should be an Incorporated Association under the Victorian Incorporated Associations Act.

6.4. The Lobby should be membership based for individuals and organisations with all memberships having equal rights. Membership should be open to all those who support the aims and objectives of the Lobby.

6.5. The Lobby should aim to achieve equal representation of men and women.

6.6. Management of the Lobby should be by a 10 person committee of management. Of these there should be 4 lesbians and 4 gay men. The other two positions are "untagged". The committee of management will elect 2 co-convenors, 1 gay man and 1 lesbian.