



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Response to the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey

Wednesday 16 August 2017



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Background

On Tuesday 8 August 2017, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Finance Minister Mathias Cormann announced the government's plans for a postal vote regarding same-sex marriage.

The postal plebiscite will be conducted on a voluntary basis and a final result will be secured by 15 November 2017. If the majority of Australians vote 'Yes', Members of Parliament (MPs) will be given a free vote in Parliament however, they will not be bound by postal vote results. If Australians vote 'No', the government will not go ahead with the free vote.

While there are many issues concerning the validity of the postal plebiscite including the integrity of the electoral roll, voter fraud, lost ballots and votes being administered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics without protections of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*; like many MPs and concerned Australian citizens, fundamentally the ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee (NGAC) feels that this process is going to hurt LGBTQIA+ people.

As Senator Rice recently raised, 'we know how damaging, how divisive and how hurtful the public debate over this issue is going to be, and we've already seen that really hurtful material start to appear in the public.' (2017, p. 82).

Compliance with policy and core values

In the *Future of the Library and Information Science Profession: Action List*, ALIA stated that 'we must uphold and promote the traditional values of fairness and equality associated with libraries' (2013, p.4).

The proposed postal survey gives license to harmful debate within the Australian community which may further marginalise the LGBTQIA+ community. This directly contradicts the values of fairness and equality that ALIA promotes. Respect for the diversity of all people is a core ALIA value (ALIA, 2007) and the promotion of inclusion and eradication of discrimination are key aspects of librarians' responsibilities towards individuals and societies per the *IFLA Code of Ethics* (IFLA, 2012).

While ALIA policies reflect that library professionals are committed to the free flow of information (see *Statement on professional conduct*, ALIA, 2007), this commitment includes the assertion of equitable rights to information and resisting those who would restrict access to information and ideas, as outlined in *Statement on free access to information* (ALIA, 2015). This is relevant as homophobic and transphobic hate speech seeks to, by its very nature, silence and restrict opposing identities and ideas.



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ALIA would be in line with its own policies and values to stand up against this survey and the "no" campaign.

Additionally, as a representative of Australian library and information professionals, ALIA should assert that LGBTQIA+ members of the association and the LIS industry have the same rights as their cisgender and/or heterosexual colleagues.

Free speech and neutrality

We recognise that libraries and librarians are never neutral, and that silence on an issue is an endorsement of existing inequality and power. Chris Bourg writes:

"Libraries are not neutral because we exist within societies and systems that are not neutral. But above and beyond that, libraries also contribute to certain kinds of inequalities because of the way in which we exercise influence over the diversity (or lack thereof) of information we make available to our communities and the methods by which we provide access to that information"

(Bourg, 2015).

Librarianship has never been neutral, and today's professional associations are founded on values of equity, intellectual freedom, and democracy. Librarians have traditionally championed information literacy and informed public debate. We have a role to play in the current marriage equality debate, as marginalisation in all forms disrupts our core values. Marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ Australians is already happening as politicians, lobby groups, and the media are currently not prevented from making malicious and misleading campaign statements as in other electoral campaigns. Similarly, as the postal survey does not currently have the protections afforded by the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, it is important to advocate for critical evaluation of information.

How can we claim to serve our communities fairly and equally if we remain silent, and thereby complicit, in the denial of basic human rights to some? How can we claim to welcome LGBTQIA+ folks in libraries if we're not willing to pledge our public support for their human rights?

As Amy Sonnie has stated for #Libraries4BlackLives, "If we are to fulfill our mission and uphold library values then we must be advocates *against* marginalization and inequity, and *for* justice and equity" (Sonnie, 2016). Silence on marriage equality, and the divisive postal survey, will only undermine ALIA's and the profession's, core values.



Australian libraries and the LGBTQIA+ community

"Not long ago, I asked a room full of about 30 LGBTQ youth, most in their early twenties, to raise their hand if they were bullied at school. Almost everyone did. I then asked those who had been bullied if they had taken refuge in their school library. About 75% of the room raised their hand"
(Day, 2012, p.8).

Respect for the diversity of all people is a core ALIA value (ALIA, 2017). Australian libraries should continue to be safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ Australians. As Suzie Day wrote in 2012, 'No matter what you choose to do, by making sure your library is LGBTQ inclusive, you are making a positive difference to your community' (Day, 2012 p.8). During this potentially volatile period for LGBTQIA+ Australians, ALIA should undoubtedly assist libraries to be inclusive and help its members in serving their diverse communities, by providing resources, support, and advocacy.

As R. David Lankes has written, "A library should be a safe space, but it will only be that if librarians continue to understand the threats all their community members face and work to overcome them" (Lankes, 2017). Helping people feel welcome in a library space isn't just about saying they are welcome - it takes action, and resistance against those who would seek to marginalise members of our communities based on their gender identity or sexuality. ALIA is well placed to assist and encourage libraries to take action in support of LGBTQIA+ Australians.

Recommendations

To support equal rights of LGBTQIA+ Australians, ALIA NGAC proposes the following actions for ALIA and the Australian library community:

- Provide a strong voice advocating this as not a political issue, rather a human rights issue.
- Highlight the need to critically evaluate information quality and bias in public discourse.
- Provide guidance on how to register to vote.
- Circulate organisational, community and individual stories from clients and staff in the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Share and/or develop resources for creating safe spaces in libraries.



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- Promote resources for educating library patrons about LGBTQIA+ themes and issues.
- Challenge the idea that Library services and professionals are inherently neutral, and that silence on the matter is an endorsement of existing inequality.
- Develop a poster/resource/toolkit that can be used by all libraries in the lead up to the vote, to inform public, staff, and clients and include how libraries can help those affected.

We respectfully request that the above mentioned recommendations be fully considered by the ALIA Board and that ALIA Office and its various groups implement the recommendations (or those of a similar nature and impact) over the coming weeks and months.

Finally, we implore the Board to advocate to the profession, and its stakeholders, to vote for human rights, vote for belonging, vote yes.

Prepared by

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Endorsed

James McGoran, Acting-Chair, ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee.

The ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee invite you to also share and endorse this response.



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