

Where does WCC stand on same-sex marriage?



More than a dozen local councils around Australia have declared their support for marriage equality? Where does the Warrnambool City Council stand? Image: Twizzler

Analysis – Carol Altmann

Is the Warrnambool City Council in favour of same sex marriage?

I realised during a recent visit to California – one of 37 US states to have legal same sex marriage – that I didn't know the answer and that it was time to find out.

While some people may argue that taking a stand on marriage equality is not a local council issue, it most certainly is, because it reflects what sort of community we are and what sort of community we wish to live in.

In just the same way that many councils are now declaring their positions on family violence, racism, asylum seekers and

climate change – all, big-ticket, federal issues with local implications – so too are they choosing to stand up in support of same-sex marriage as part of social justice and equality.

It is all about sending a message, a clear and unequivocal message, that we are tolerant, open-hearted and accepting of a diverse community and in a highly masculine, regional city like Warrnambool, this is even more important, because growing up gay in such an environment can be tough – even in 2015.

Byron Shire Mayor **Simon Richardson** [last year sent](#) a marriage equality proclamation to every council around Australia and has since been watching the results flow in.

I was surprised to learn that, perhaps prompted by Mayor Richardson, more than a dozen councils around Australia have since declared their support for marriage equality, including the unanimous vote by Hobart City Council in April.

Other councils to express their support thus far include Albury, Glen Eira, Greater Geelong- Surf Coast, Tenterfield, Byron Shire, Sydney, Leichardt and Port Douglas, while Launceston has embarrassed itself by going in the other direction and voting 8-3 against.

I say embarrassed itself because there is no doubt the wave of support for marriage equality among [the majority of Australians](#) (72% in a 2014 poll) will soon see Australia go where [so many countries](#) have gone before (21 at the most recent count) by legalising marriage between same sex partners.

Unfortunately our local politicians are embarrassing themselves too, with Wannon MP **Dan Tehan**, South-West coast MP Dr **Denis Napthine** and Victorian Upper House MP **James Purcell** all opposed to marriage equality.

Indeed some of the statements by our political representatives have been nothing short of extraordinary.

Take this example from Mr Tehan [in 2010](#): “This isn’t a matter of discrimination of same-sex couples, this is about the union of marriage which is traditionally between a man and a woman and I believe it should stay like that into the future.”

Boy, that certainly sounds like discrimination to me.

And this from Mr Purcell, [also in 2010](#): “I think same-sex relationships are quite legitimate – what people want to do is their business – but marriage is an institution that’s been around for thousands of years and I don’t think we need to change it.”

Quite legitimate? What people want to do is their business? Surely this is not a discussion on whether it is *okay to be gay* – god forbid we have to roll back the debate *that far* – but about equality and human rights.

Most of our Warrnambool City councillors, I am delighted to say, completely agree.



Warrnambool Mayor Michael

Neoh is a supporter of marriage equality. Image: ABC.

Bluestone contacted each of the councillors to ask the simple question: "Do you support gay marriage?" and five out of the seven chose to respond. Those that didn't, disappointingly, were **Cr Peter Hulin** and **Cr Rob Askew**.

The remaining five, however, were all happy to express their support and here are their written responses:

Mayor Michael Neoh: "I do not have any issue with consensual marriage between any two adults. This is my personal opinion."

Cr Brian Kelson: "I don't believe this should be a issue for local council, personally I believe in equality, but it will be a Federal decision that will make it a reality."

Cr Jacinta Ermacora: "I'm sure you know already, but just confirming I support marriage equality. No government regulated institution should discriminate against any one in our society. What the religions believe is their business and will not be impacted by Bill (Shorten) and Tanya's (Plibersek's) legislation."

Cr Peter Sycopoulis: "I have always tried to live a life where I treat others with equality, fairness and respect, irrespective of race, religion or even sexual orientation. I see no reason why I should treat the subject of gay marriage any differently. I support the concept of an individual's right to choose.

"In particular, I find it quite unfair that same sex couples are not afforded the same legal rights and protection as others. The legal recognition of same-sex marriage would not only give all couples the same legal rights and protection but also the same legal responsibilities to their partner and family."

Cr Kylie Gaston: “I have been a supporter of same sex marriage for years. I have many gay friends and have never been able to understand the logic that I had the right to marry and they did not. This is about ending discrimination. So as a nation I believe we should remove discrimination against same sex de facto couples in federal legislation as an absolute priority so that all citizens of Australia will have equal rights on this matter.

“I find it frustrating and sad that we are now lagging behind many other countries over this matter especially when polling is indicating a clear majority of Australians support SSM. I’m looking forward to a couple of weddings of some very close friends in the not too far distant future!”

The question now is which councillor will take the next step and table a motion – or even Mayor Richardson’s proclamation – that the Warrnambool City Council declares its support for marriage equality?

This is as an opportunity for the council to not only add its voice to an important national discussion, but to remind every citizen of Warrnambool – regardless of gender, race or sexuality – that they are all equal.



The rainbow crosswalk in West Hollywood, Los Angeles.
Image: TripAdvisor.

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