



11 September 2017

New Generation Advisory Committee

By email

Dear Committee Members

On 23 August, we sent this response to your recommendations about an ALIA position on marriage equality:

"We welcome and value the input of NGAC and thank the committee for providing good advice and clear actions around the same sex marriage plebiscite. As a result of this advice, we have already approved a statement, which is live on the ALIA website and we will be providing a platform through FAIR so that the issues contained in the NGAC proposal can be aired. This platform will also enable resources and initiatives to be shared to the benefit of all members. We are not convinced that a poster/toolkit will be a good investment at this time, as there are official materials available and constraints about what government-funded libraries are able to display, but we are happy to revisit this as the situation unfolds."

Since then, we have been monitoring the marriage equality discussions in the media and in Parliament. Following the High Court decision on 7 September, the next phase will be the postal survey.

The Board appreciates NGAC's thoughtful response to the marriage equality discussion, and agrees that this is about human rights rather than politics.

We know that 'vote yes' is the heartfelt response of many of our Members and the ALIA Board has not been silent on the subject. We have assured our LGBTQIA+ members of our continued support. We have also encouraged members to register to vote, and we have asked libraries to provide information to users to help them understand the issue. We have put up an information page on the ALIA website and Director Jane Cowell and Vice-President Lyndall Ley Osborne have posted positive pieces on the FAIR website.

Even though emotion is running high, and there is strong pressure from Members on social media, we have stopped just short of stating that the Association promotes a yes vote. We have done so, not because we think the topic is unimportant, but because it is vitally important and extends far beyond our library world.

Within our own sector, we know that our Members are engaged, intelligent thinkers who will make their own decisions.

In terms of a public statement, there are two reasons for our position. First, we know from private correspondence that not all our Members are pro same sex marriage. We have been asked to respect their right to hold an alternative opinion. Second, we represent both Personal and



Institutional Members. Institutional Members are 20% of the total, and include faith libraries. We have sounded out several Institutional Members and although they are not in the 'no' camp, they will not be making a statement on this issue and do not see it as ALIA's role to do so either.

Instead of turning the debate in on ourselves, we encourage Members to turn their energy outwards, to provide quality, credible, truthful information to anyone who is undecided about where they stand on marriage equality.

As the situation unfolds, we will continue to monitor it and respond where we feel it is appropriate. We will certainly be encouraging all our Members to exercise their vote.

Kind regards

Sue McKerracher
ALIA CEO