

Media release

For immediate release 30 August 2017

The Marriage Equality Postal Opinion Poll: Human rights lawyers throw their support behind NSW Law Society President

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (**ALHR**) has spoken out in support of NSW Law Society President Pauline Wright and expressed its disappointment at criticisms levelled at her following a joint statement in support of marriage equality made by the Law Society of NSW, the NSW Bar Association and the NSW branch of the Australian Medical Association.

“ALHR strongly and unequivocally supports the joint statement,” said ALHR’s LGBTI Committee Co-chair Nicholas Stewart. “The few but vocal members of the legal profession calling for the President’s resignation do not in our view speak for the vast majority of lawyers and barristers who are committed to advocating for the right of all Australian’s to equality before the law.”

“In making the joint statement, the NSW Law Society and Ms Wright were speaking on a matter that was resolved by motion at the Council level. Marriage equality is a fundamental aspect of realising legal equality, removing discrimination and improving human rights protections for LGBTI Australians. It is a vital step on the path to holistic LGBTI inclusion.”

ALHR LGBTI Committee Co-chair Kathryn Cramp said, “In a growing climate of homophobia with the first “No” campaign advertisement playing on television and offensive posters appearing around the country, this is the time to voice support for marriage equality to show the LGBTI community that they are not isolated. We applaud the NSW Law Society and President Pauline Wright for their advocacy and look forward to other organisations following suit.”

The High Court of Australia has unanimously held that marriage equality is constitutional and may be enacted by the Federal Parliament. ALHR is against the non-binding postal opinion poll on marriage equality because ALHR considers that parliament, by virtue of representative democracy, is the forum for the debate, passing and ultimate assent of laws.

Nicholas Stewart said, “As lawyers, we are uniquely placed to speak out in support of human rights and the rule of law. We have a special role to play in educating the public about the importance of fundamental principles such as equality and non-discrimination. The right to freedom of speech or freedom of religion does not trump the right of LGBTI Australians to live free from discriminatory laws. Those who have criticised their professional body or its president for resolving to speak in favour of a human rights reform appear to neglect well-established international jurisprudence to this effect, particularly when marriage equality is overwhelmingly supported by most Australians.”

ALHR supports the calls on the Federal Government to put an immediate end to the Marriage Equality Postal Opinion Poll.

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ALHR was established in 1993 and is a national association of Australian solicitors, barristers, academics, judicial officers and law students who practise and promote international human rights law in Australia. ALHR has active and engaged National, State and Territory committees and specialist thematic committees. Through advocacy, media engagement, education, networking, research and training, ALHR promotes, practices and protects universally accepted standards of human rights throughout Australia and overseas.