

This is not intended to show any discrimination against the gay community, but simply to uphold the sanctity and purpose of marriage, which is the union of a man and a woman in not only expressing their love for one another, but in also bringing future generations into this world.

Ms Gabrielle Tesoriero from my electorate wrote me a single sentence which summed up the views of so many:

It's important that the definition of marriage remains the union of a man and a woman.

This brings me to my final point. The claim that is made here today that the community is already in support of a change to gay marriages is overstated and that community opposition to such a change—as it is in my seat—is understated. As a teacher for many years, I supported all kinds of families. I always knew that was my responsibility as a human being, let alone as a teacher. Yet I hold for myself, and for 70 per cent of the people in Robertson, the right to hold firmly to the view that marriage is that union between a man and a woman. (*Time expired*)

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (12:27): As the member for O'Connor, it is my primary responsibility to represent the views of my constituents in parliament on all issues. Over the past several months I have invited feedback from the electorate regarding their views on same-sex marriage. I regularly send a newsletter to my constituents containing information on a variety of issues taking place both in Canberra and through the electorate.

In my newsletter, I requested that constituents contact my office and share their views with me on same-sex marriage. I also advertised this issue in a number of newspapers throughout the electorate. I note, after listening to many of the speeches this morning, that the results that I received were indicative of those in many electorates across Australia. I received 612 responses on this issue, and I thank those people who felt compelled to respond. To break the figures down, I received 373 letters, 138 emails and 12 phone calls, a total of 523 responses, from the constituents of O'Connor highlighting that they do not support same-sex marriage. I received 71 letters, 13 emails and five phone calls, a total of 89 responses, from constituents who support same-sex marriage.

An overwhelming majority of responses felt that marriage is a permanent union between a man and a woman. I would like to acknowledge that the feedback I received by no means represents all constituents of my electorate. That said, I do believe that the comments and feedback I have received broadly reflect the attitude of the electorate towards same-sex marriage. I hope that this position can be understood as being without any disrespect to same-sex relationships. I believe our society needs to continue to have a civilised discussion around this issue. It is vitally important that our society works to remove discrimination against sexual preference.

Many speeches that we heard earlier today reflect that members of parliament right across Australia welcome this discussion, regardless of their political preference. My position is not meant to be disrespectful to those who support same-sex marriage, and I respect the loving relationships that they may share with one another. I believe the electorate of O'Connor is supportive of removing discrimination against sexual preference, while still maintaining the sanctity of marriage as a permanent union between a man and a woman.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (12:30): I certainly welcome the motion that was put before the House previously and, as part of an ongoing reflection of consultation with community, this is another opportunity to do that. From my perspective on the topic of same-sex marriage, there are times to lead and times to follow the community. Picking when and why is very much the challenge for all of us in a representative democracy in our Westminster parliamentary system. At all times, right or wrong, a member of parliament should make their own best judgments. On an issue like pricing carbon through an emissions trading scheme, I have chosen to lead community with the national interest in mind. On the issue of same-sex marriage, I am choosing to follow community, again as a matter of judgment and again with the national interest in mind.

Ordinarily I believe in the classical and conservative exposition of representative democracy, that we are elected to exercise our judgment as a vote on the basis of fact and reason tested in debate. We are dealing with customs and traditions in this case that have been built in Australia over a long period of time under the rule of law.

This conversation certainly tests the moral code of not just 150 MPs but of all Australians. After consulting widely and listening closely I still have not heard a satisfactory consensus about what the state's role itself in marriage actually is, nor what it should be. I note, for example, that there are even incursions from traditionally right-wing, conservative proponents such as Tim Wilson from the IPA identifying jurisdictions like France where the state's only involvement is to maintain a register of accredited marriage agencies and it is then up to each religious or cultural institution to determine their level of comfort with the definition of marriage, essentially, and somewhat controversially, removing the statue law of the Marriage Act and relying on a long history of common law interpretation of our norms, traditions and cultures.

The fact is in our jurisdiction and in my electorate as well there is a deep cultural conviction that the state's definition of marriage does matter. Yet at the same time we seem somewhat universally comfortable allowing this