

Tassie poll a big step for gay marriage

Written by Herald Sun | Jill Singer
Thursday, 22 September 2011 10:02

We hear a lot of cynicism about politics these days and the alleged uselessness of caring or fighting for political change. Julia Gillard, Tony Abbott - what's the difference?

They both put the human rights of asylum seekers down their list of political priorities.

And they both run around wearing fluoro vests and hard hats trying to convince us they're fair dinkum supporters of hard-working, decent Australians.

While they're at odds over putting a price on carbon pollution, it's pretty amazing how much Julia and Tony actually agree on.

Their twin position that gays and lesbians shouldn't be allowed to get married is another spectacular case in point, especially when you consider that Gillard is an atheist, child-free woman living in a de facto relationship and Abbott is a Catholic, married father of three.

We are however, seeing ground-roots political activism starting to erode this unholy political alliance of social conservatism.

Supporters of same-sex marriage are making real political gains. The issue is rarely out of the headlines and is causing major headaches for Labor. Strangely enough, it doesn't seem to cause nearly the same angst for the Coalition, although I note that a fair swag of gays in my village vote conservative.

Clearly, gay and lesbian activists think there's more ground to be gained by targeting Labor.

This is probably unsurprising when we consider the commentary tolerated within conservative circles. Miranda Devine's recent linking of the London riots, fatherless children gone wild and Senator Penny Wong's baby announcement is a case in point. Then there's Bob Katter's wild

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statements on homosexuals - they don't even exist in North Queensland, says Katter, even though they clearly exist within his own family.

The debate over same-sex marriage is set to dominate the forthcoming ALP national conference in December. While efforts have been made to hose it down within Labor ranks, it was refreshing to hear former NSW premier Kristina Keneally this week come out in support of marriage equality. "Let's bring it on," she says of the looming debate.

If Keneally, a Catholic, can take this stand, it makes you wonder why Gillard seems reticent to take on homophobes.

Gauging the degree of homophobia in any community is always difficult. At one stage, for example, Tasmania was considered the most homophobic of all Australia's states and territories.

A 2005 Roy Morgan poll of more than 3000 Tasmanians confirmed the Apple Isle's anti-gay sentiment - 40 per cent of Tasmanians then said they believed homosexuality was "immoral" and that homosexuals should not be able to adopt.

Attitudes are apparently shifting. A poll released this week found close to 60 per cent of Tasmanians are now actively in favour of gay marriage with 35 per cent opposed and 6 per cent unsure.

This change of attitude is being reflected in Parliament. Tasmania, the last state to decriminalise homosexuality, is now set to become the first to express in-principle support for marriage equality.

The new laws mean Tasmania will recognise same-sex marriages conducted elsewhere, even though such marriages could not legally be conducted under Tasmania state law.

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It's a small, but significant move designed to put pressure on the Federal Government to reform the Marriage Act.

What it highlights is that political activism is not a lost cause and that determined campaigning and advocacy can help shift public attitudes and create legal change.

Source: [Herald Sun](#)