

Same-sex couples by Commonwealth Electoral Division

Introduction

On 27 May 2004 the Attorney-General introduced legislation¹ to amend the *Marriage Act 1961* to, inter alia, define ‘marriage’ as the union of a man and a woman and to prevent same-sex couples from adopting children from overseas. The proposed amendments and the ensuing debate have raised interest in the question of the number of same-sex couples in Australia.

Statistics on the number of same-sex couples in Australia have been collected in the last two Censuses of Population and Housing. This Research Note shows the number of same-sex couples enumerated at the 2001 Census for each Commonwealth Electoral Division. The table on the following page shows the number of same-sex couples and the party holding the division for each current Commonwealth Electoral Divisions.

Data collection

Every five years the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducts a Census of Population and Housing. Among the statistics collected in this exercise is data on family relationships and marital status. The ABS began collecting and tabulating data on same-sex couples at the 1996 Census. Prior to the 1996 Census data on same-sex couples was not collected.

For the Census the ABS uses the concept of ‘Social Marital Status’

to define relationships. Under this concept a marriage exists ‘when two people live together as husband and wife, or partners, regardless of whether the marriage is formalised through registration’. Information on social marital status is collected in the relationship question (question 5) of the Census schedule. Same-sex couples are defined as ‘two persons of the same sex who report a de facto partnership in the relationship question, and who are usually resident in the same household’.²

The Census form thus requires same-sex couples to volunteer information about their relationship rather than have such information explicitly asked for. This may lead to some degree of understatement of the number of same-sex couples as it may not be immediately apparent that this is a valid option for the Census form. Another potential source of undercounting could be the possible reluctance of same-sex couples to identify as such in an ‘official form’.

Highlights

At the 2001 Census there were 19 594 same-sex couples in Australia. This represents a significant increase on the number enumerated at the 1996 Census. Same-sex couples represent 0.5 per cent of the number of couples (both registered married and de facto married) in Australia at the 2001 Census.

A notable feature of the data is the concentration of same-sex couples in two electoral divisions. The inner Sydney divisions of Sydney and Grayndler together contain 3443 same-sex couples, or 17.6 per cent of the same-sex couples enumerated at the 2001 Census. Same-sex couples tend to be concentrated in inner-city divisions of the capital cities (particularly Sydney and Melbourne). On the other hand, rural and regional divisions tend to have low numbers of same-sex couples enumerated. A number of metropolitan divisions (both inner-metropolitan and outer-metropolitan) also have low numbers of same-sex couples enumerated.

The average number of same-sex couples per electoral division is 130 while the median is 79 couples. Almost two-thirds of the divisions have less than 100 same-sex couples enumerated.

1. *Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill 2004*. See Jennifer Norberry, ‘Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill 2004’, *Bills Digest*, no. 155, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2003–04.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2001 Census Dictionary*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2001.

**Same-sex couples by Commonwealth Electoral Division
2001 Census of Population and Housing**

Division	Party	No	Division	Party	No	Division	Party	No
Adelaide (SA)	LIB	284	Forde (Qld)	LIB	86	Maribyrnong (Vic)	ALP	30
Aston (Vic)	LIB	39	Forrest (WA)	LIB	54	Mayo (SA)	LIB	95
Ballarat (Vic)	ALP	124	Fowler (NSW)	ALP	40	McEwen (Vic)	LIB	83
Banks (NSW)	ALP	85	Franklin (Tas)	ALP	58	McMillan (Vic)	ALP	37
Barker (SA)	LIB	46	Fraser (ACT)	ALP	319	McPherson (Qld)	LIB	103
Barton (NSW)	ALP	131	Fremantle (WA)	ALP	109	Melbourne (Vic)	ALP	741
Bass (Tas)	ALP	51	Gellibrand (Vic)	ALP	268	Melbourne Ports (Vic)	ALP	629
Batman (Vic)	ALP	428	Gilmore (NSW)	LIB	72	Menzies (Vic)	LIB	43
Bendigo (Vic)	ALP	71	Gippsland (Vic)	NP	45	Mitchell (NSW)	LIB	56
Bennelong (NSW)	LIB	121	Goldstein (Vic)	LIB	131	Moncrieff (Qld)	LIB	156
Berowra (NSW)	LIB	78	Grayndler (NSW)	ALP	1178	Moore (WA)	LIB	58
Blair (Qld)	LIB	47	Greenway (NSW)	ALP	84	Moreton (Qld)	LIB	144
Blaxland (NSW)	ALP	39	Grey (SA)	LIB	30	Murray (Vic)	LIB	31
Bonython (SA)	ALP	66	Griffith (Qld)	ALP	215	New England (NSW)	IND	57
Boothby (SA)	LIB	103	Groom (Qld)	LIB	33	Newcastle (NSW)	ALP	195
Bowman (Qld)	ALP	76	Gwydir (NSW)	NP	31	North Sydney (NSW)	LIB	268
Braddon (Tas)	ALP	21	Hasluck (WA)	ALP	87	O'Connor (WA)	LIB	34
Bradfield (NSW)	LIB	83	Herbert (Qld)	LIB	118	Oxley (Qld)	ALP	79
Brand (WA)	ALP	57	Higgins (Vic)	LIB	437	Page (NSW)	NP	100
Brisbane (Qld)	ALP	506	Hindmarsh (SA)	LIB	117	Parkes (NSW)	NP	37
Bruce (Vic)	ALP	55	Hinkler (Qld)	NP	18	Parramatta (NSW)	LIB	112
Burke (Vic)	ALP	80	Holt (Vic)	ALP	43	Paterson (NSW)	LIB	53
Calare (NSW)	IND	53	Hotham (Vic)	ALP	102	Pearce (WA)	LIB	91
Calwell (Vic)	ALP	58	Hughes (NSW)	LIB	55	Perth (WA)	ALP	340
Canberra (ACT)	ALP	187	Hume (NSW)	LIB	94	Petrie (Qld)	LIB	79
Canning (WA)	LIB	59	Hunter (NSW)	LIB	50	Port Adelaide (SA)	ALP	164
Capricornia (Qld)	ALP	27	Indi (Vic)	LIB	67	Prospect (NSW)	ALP	30
Casey (Vic)	LIB	46	Isaacs (Vic)	ALP	78	Rankin (Qld)	ALP	60
Charlton (NSW)	ALP	81	Jagajaga (Vic)	ALP	89	Reid (NSW)	ALP	79
Chifley (NSW)	ALP	96	Kalgoorlie (WA)	LIB	66	Richmond (NSW)	NP	122
Chisholm (Vic)	ALP	114	Kennedy (Qld)	IND	40	Riverina (NSW)	NP	44
Cook (NSW)	LIB	65	Kingsford Smith (NSW)	ALP	254	Robertson (NSW)	LIB	119
Corangamite (Vic)	LIB	72	Kingston (SA)	ALP	81	Ryan (Qld)	LIB	85
Corio (Vic)	ALP	68	Kooyong (Vic)	LIB	176	Scullin (Vic)	ALP	36
Cowan (WA)	ALP	59	La Trobe (Vic)	LIB	90	Shortland (NSW)	ALP	55
Cowper (NSW)	NP	70	Lalor (Vic)	ALP	79	Solomon (NT)	CLP	109
Cunningham (NSW)	GRN	122	Leichhardt (Qld)	LIB	155	Stirling (WA)	ALP	103
Curtin (WA)	LIB	141	Lilley (Qld)	ALP	177	Sturt (SA)	LIB	104
Dawson (Qld)	NP	47	Lindsay (NSW)	LIB	85	Swan (WA)	ALP	154
Deakin (Vic)	LIB	81	Lingiari (NT)	ALP	53	Sydney (NSW)	ALP	2265
Denison (Tas)	ALP	126	Longman (Qld)	LIB	56	Tangney (WA)	LIB	60
Dickson (Qld)	LIB	53	Lowe (NSW)	ALP	226	Throsby (NSW)	ALP	46
Dobell (NSW)	LIB	107	Lyne (NSW)	NP	65	Wakefield (SA)	LIB	49
Dunkley (Vic)	LIB	86	Lyons (Tas)	ALP	33	Wannon (Vic)	LIB	36
Eden-Monaro (NSW)	LIB	111	Macarthur (NSW)	LIB	64	Warringah (NSW)	LIB	129
Fadden (Qld)	LIB	68	Mackellar (NSW)	LIB	86	Watson (NSW)	ALP	132
Fairfax (Qld)	LIB	84	Macquarie (NSW)	LIB	268	Wentworth (NSW)	LIB	528
Farrer (NSW)	LIB	45	Makin (SA)	LIB	51	Werriwa (NSW)	ALP	81
Fisher (Qld)	LIB	62	Mallee (Vic)	NP	20	Wide Bay (Qld)	NP	41
Flinders (Vic)	LIB	66	Maranoa (Qld)	NP	24	Wills (Vic)	ALP	210

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing, unpublished data.

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