

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 14 August 2017, the following matter was referred to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee for inquiry and report by 13 February 2018:

Arrangements relating to the collection of statistical information on the views of all Australians on the electoral roll on whether or not the law should be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry, as announced by the Government (the postal survey) with particular reference to:

- (a) what information will be collected and how it will be collected, aggregated and reported;
- (b) what departments and agencies will be involved and what resources will be provided;
- (c) the legislative basis for the collection and how matters such as advertising, fraud, access to the roll and privacy will be regulated;
- (d) the integrity of the roll and the potential for disenfranchisement of voters;
- (e) protections against offensive, misleading or intimidating material or behaviour, especially towards affected communities;
- (f) how issues incurred during the collection will be addressed;
- (g) whether the information will be stored and what controls on future access will apply;
- (h) all aspects of the conduct of the collection and related matters; and
- (i) proposals for use of the information obtained, including to inform future legislation.¹

Conduct of the inquiry

1.2 The inquiry was advertised on the committee's website. The committee invited submissions from individuals and organisations by 31 January 2018. The committee received 41 submissions. Submissions received by the committee are listed at Appendix 1.

1.3 The committee held three public hearings in Canberra on 17 August 2017, 7 September 2017, and 15 September 2017. A list of the witnesses who gave evidence at the public hearings is available at Appendix 2.

1.4 Submissions, additional information and the Hansard transcript of evidence may be accessed through the committee website at: www.aph.gov.au/senate_fpa.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 52—14 August 2017, p. 1690.

Focus of the committee

1.5 The committee wishes to stress that the focus of this inquiry, as per the terms of reference, is not the legalisation of same-sex marriage, but rather to scrutinise the process that the government chose to undertake in order to reach the point where the national parliament would consider legislation on this matter.

1.6 The committee has approached this inquiry as a watching brief. Soon after the announcement of the postal survey, the committee held a number of public hearings speaking with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Electoral Commission and other agencies assisting to deliver the postal survey. The committee's overarching concern has been the treatment and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people throughout the postal survey.

Structure of the report

1.7 Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter which outlines the administrative details of the inquiry. The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 describes the process leading to the postal vote;
- Chapter 3 focuses on the conduct of the survey;
- Chapter 4 examines the offensive and denigrating material produced and disseminated during the period leading up to, and during, the postal survey; and
- Chapter 5 draws together the committee's conclusions and recommendations.