

## ‘LOCAL’ NEWS ONLY

A reader has criticised this website for informing Woronora residents of a wide range of social and political issues, instead of a purely local focus.

Writing before the legalising of marriage equality last month, he contested an article suggesting that religious conservatives were “defending their ‘freedom’ to discriminate in God’s name” against same-sex couples, but he did not explain further.

In reply, the editor Don Pagé defended the community’s right to be told of contentious issues, with weblinks published at the time to religious conservatives opposing same-sex marriage, as part of an ‘Opinion Roundup’.

The WVRA Inc’s constitution in fact encourages an active public role, despite an imputation otherwise by our critic, who was not specific about it. As editor, Don Pagé should know since he wrote the constitution, which was passed by WVRA Inc years ago.

Our critic preferred local issues to predominate in our website and newsletter, listing a few during an exchange of emails with the editor.

He was offered series of articles on his chosen local issues if he did the work organising the campaigns, with extensive door-knocking suggested to get support with petitions. Our critic chose not to take on the challenge, or even to respond further.

The full email exchange is given below, and he is identified only as SW for privacy reasons.

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*Letter to WVRA website/newsletter, 30 November 2017*

“We received your latest newsletter last week.

“Your comment regarding religious conservatives ‘defending their freedom to discriminate in God’s name’ is offensive and has nothing to do with defending or improving the Woronora Valley.

“The WVRA is supposed to be for issues relating to the Woronora Valley and its residents. I suggest you read the “Objects and Principles” section of the Constitution and stop pushing personal agendas.  
“SW”

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*Reply to SW, 13 Dec 2017*

“We are happy to publish on our website your differing views on same-sex marriage, although Parliament has since ratified the overwhelming public view.

“You may wish to provide a more detailed argument for publication. If you prefer, your name can be withheld from publication.

“Our website article (Freedom’ to Discriminate) was balanced by providing two links to websites with the opposite view on same-sex marriage. I hope that you read them. This diversity of opinion allowed readers to decide for themselves, once they read all the information provided. It was labelled as “Opinion Roundup”.

“It is a fact that the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 forbade discrimination based on “sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ... (in) the provision of goods, facilities and services ...” (Part I, 3(b)). All those who provided a marriage service would break the law by refusing same-sex partners, until controversial amendments this month to legalise this discrimination – by exempting a refusal by religious celebrants to marry same-sex couples.

“It is not ‘offensive’ to point out an illegality in an argument, however uncomfortable the fact might be. The proof is that it took an Act of Parliament to exempt this religious discrimination from the law more recently, after people voted strongly in favour of same-sex marriage.

“The WVRA Constitution encourages ‘active involvement in community affairs’, and in the ‘interests of the community generally’. There is no geographical restriction on those interests or issues.,  
Don Pagé, WVRA website editor

*Second email to WVRA Inc.*

"Don,

"You have completely missed the point I was making.

"If the residents of Woronora want to find out about same-sex marriage, political issues or how the economy is going, I'm pretty sure they don't rely on your newsletter for the information.

"Just stick to things which relate to the Woronora Valley – If you can't find enough to fill a few lines on half a page with local issues, you're not looking very far.

"How about lack of policing of speeding boats on the river, the increasing of the water speed limit because people complained it took them too long to get anywhere, the endless roadworks and now mains replacement in Prices Circuit, arrogant residents who have "resumed" the footpaths as private car parking etc etc.

"You're not publishing the Daily Telegraph – stick to local issues and keep your religious and social agendas to yourself."

"SW"

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*Second reply by WVRA Inc.*

"SW,

"You have a right to your opinion on the local website, which differs from many others judging by the hundreds of hits each week on the website. Yours is the first complaint that I can recall.

"Perhaps you missed earlier articles on boat speed; and on essential sewer and stormwater work in Prices Circuit, which was triggered by a local resident and her petition about sewer overflows into local property. It was publicised first on the WVRA website, and official action was quickly started on a series of costly problems, long overlooked.

"Not enough people complained when the State Government proposed to increase the speed limit on the river. If you want to start a petition to reduce it again, that is news for the local website. Likewise if you write to our State MP to complain in the strongest terms, send us a copy and there is another story. And another when the replies arrive.

"Unless locals starting making the news and making a noise, no one will pay attention.

"But in the meantime, reader interest falls away without fresh articles on other Shire, State and Federal issues, all of which can affect or interest the Woronora community. The same-sex marriage article included weblinks to people opposing it; it gave both sides.

"So it is over to you on the boat-speed limit, if you want to work seriously on a petition door-to-door, and on your State MP. That will be fresh news, and we look forward to publishing it.

Regards, Don

14 December 2017