

Same-sex marriage imposition

By Janet Albrechtsen, *The Australian*, 16 March 2016

We hit peak stupidity on Monday morning in the same-sex marriage cause when accounting firm PwC tallied up the apparent financial costs to the country of Australians voting on same-sex marriage. More than half a billion dollars, say the PwC number-crunchers.

PwC: \$281m in lost opportunity costs

Apart from the administrative costs of holding a stand-alone plebiscite (\$158 million) PwC guesstimated that \$281m in lost opportunity costs to the economy because people have to take time out of their Saturday to vote. By that logic, we should get serious about saving money and do away with elections altogether.

Just think of the savings. If we scratch all local, state and federal elections, we could fund extra health and education services, higher pensions and so on. And consider the lost opportunity costs from millions of Australians having to find a car park, queue to vote, then completing the ballot paper at every election. The lost opportunity costs alone of Australians trying to decipher the Senate toilet roll ballot paper alone could surely fund handsome handouts to the middle class.

What about a refund for the lost opportunity costs of reading this tosh from PwC. You may as well try to calculate the lost opportunity costs of watching your child play Saturday sport rather than sleeping in. Or why not determine the lost opportunity costs over the course of history of all the great thinkers sitting quietly and thinking about the importance of free markets, the rule of law, property rights and so on.

This report is an embarrassment to PwC and its CEO Luke Sayers who imagined a specious set of numbers would sway the debate their way. They seriously underestimate the value of debate and democracy, not to mention the intelligence of Australian voters. This PwC report is not the work of objective, economic rationalists. It's nothing more than bogus numbers being deployed for advocacy from a firm that has become an activist for a same-sex marriage cause opposed to a plebiscite. The firm that is lauded by some index as Australia's top LGBTI employer in 2015 doesn't show much tolerance for different views on marriage. As Crikey reported, senior executive Mark Allaby resigned from the board of the Australian Christian Lobby earlier this year due to a "conflict" of interest with PwC.

PwC's economic and policy partner Jeremy Thorpe told Monday's ABC *AM* program that we've been talking about gay marriage for "some time". In other words, enough already, we declare democracy is too expensive and the debate is over.

More rubbery PwC guesstimates

Doing the media rounds, Thorpe pointed to more rubbery PwC guesstimates on ABC's News Radio — \$20 million in mental health costs because members of the LGBTI community will suffer from having their sexuality discussed. This is beyond silly.

We are talking about changes to a fundamental social institution, nothing more, nothing less. Yet more silliness from PwC partner Suzi Russell-Gilford, who admitted that there's no real body of empirical evidence, "but anecdotally we've heard ..."

When a handful of judges on the US Supreme Court legislated gay marriage without the input of the American people last year, the court's Chief Justice wrote this in a scathing dissent: "Supporters of same-sex marriage have achieved considerable success persuading their fellow citizens — through the democratic process — to adopt their views. That ends today. Five lawyers have closed the debate and enacted their own vision of marriage as a matter of constitutional law."

In Australia, at least the Abbott, then the Turnbull government agreed that a plebiscite will allow the Australian people to have a say about altering a social institution that has existed for millennia.

It's worth remembering why Australia is having a plebiscite, not a referendum as Ireland did in 2015. Two years ago, a majority of the High Court of Australia decided that the federal legislature could redefine the word marriage in section 51 (xxi) of the Australian Constitution. Instead of finding that "marriage" had meant the union between a man and woman when the Constitution was written in 1901, the court said the word means whatever the parliament decides it to mean.

Show respect for section 128 of the Constitution

A more principled and historically honest decision would have shown respect for section 128 of the Constitution — which says the Constitution may be altered only when a majority of voters in a majority of states agree to the change. Instead, a handful of arrogant, social engineering judges decided that Australians should have no say via a referendum to change the most long-settled word in the Constitution.

Even before PwC's spurious intervention, the same-sex marriage debate in Australia descended to absurd levels. Last year the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commission decided that the Catholic Church has a case to answer for "humiliating" gay, lesbian and transgender Australians after distributing a pastoral letter about Catholic teaching on marriage. Think about that. A case to answer for defending the legal definition of marriage as set down in the current Marriage Act. A case to answer for defending a definition of marriage that was accepted by both sides of politics until only a few years ago.

This activist overreach is no way to win friends or even influence people about supporting gay marriage. And let's not kid ourselves about what's going on.

Corporate types signing up to social issues has become the latest way for them to look hip and seek public absolution for their sins. Ridiculous hourly rates? But we support same-sex marriage. Partners raking in millions? Hey, we support indigenous recognition too.

The honchos of corporate Australia outdid themselves

On that score, the honchos of corporate Australia outdid themselves by signing up to full-page newspaper advertisements last year supporting a proposal for indigenous recognition — before a proposal has even been settled. It was akin to Bill Shorten's worst interview in April 2102 when he told Sky's David Speers that he agreed with what Julia Gillard said, even though Shorten had no idea what his great leader had said.

Sweating so hard on looking cool about social issues sits in direct contrast to corporate Australia's pusillanimous silence about real economic matters, like the cost of our industrial

relations laws, or the high price of over regulation. How about becoming advocates for change on these pressing fronts? Because that won't transform a fuddy-duddy economist or a boring banker into a hipster.

PwC's crass grandstanding has treated Australians as idiots

It's a shame that PwC's crass grandstanding has treated Australians as idiots. And it's a shame too that the country lacks an articulate, mainstream voice of reason to challenge this kind of nonsense from gay marriage advocates. What's next? If a majority of Australians decide at the plebiscite not to support same-sex marriage, will we hear accounting elites echo the line from German playwright Bertolt Brecht: "Would it not be easier ... for the government to dissolve the people and elect another?"

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