

Cartoon: Sarah Clarke

Not same-sex... it's just marriage

EDITORIAL

By **KATHRYN CASHMORE, DERMOTT DRANE, BROOKLYN KERIN, DEKLIN MURNAIN and MAXWELL RALSTON**

ACCORDING to statistics found on australianmarriageequality.org, 72 per cent of Australians support marriage equality, 70 per cent of Australians agree that "excluding same-sex marriage fosters discrimination", and 80 per cent of Australians agree that "everyone should be treated equally and that includes same-sex marriage".

Consider how embarrassing it is that Australia is the only English speaking country that continues to oppose gay marriage. Consider why we continue to live in such archaic ways. Why is this part of our population being denied basic human rights? The majority of Australians agree that same-sex couples deserve all the same rights as any other Australian.

So, who exactly is preventing marriage equality from reaching Australia? In short, it's the Members of Parliament who oppose same-sex marriage being legalised. Fifty-nine members of the Lower House oppose same-sex marriage and 32 Senators of the

Upper House oppose same-sex marriage. Although the number of supporters outweigh the opposed, the numbers remain frighteningly close. Interestingly, Christine Forster, brother of former prime minister Tony Abbot, is gay and the rest of Abbott's family is supportive of her right to marry. Christine says: "[When marriage equality is legalised] that will be one of the proudest moments of my life."

In June of this year, Australian Opposition Leader Bill Shorten stated in parliament, "when someone has found not just another person they can live with, but a person they can't live without, then they should have the same right to the true qualities of a bond that runs deeper than any law". Seven of 13 local members are for marriage equality with one undecided. Sharon Claydon, Member for Newcastle and fifth-generation Novocastrian is a vocal advocate of marriage equality. In parliament last week she opened her speech by arguing that "Marriage equality is not a fringe issue; it is something that affects us all ... We are all entitled to equal protection of the law, and all people should be treated equally, regardless of who we are or who we love".

The choice should be the people's in the form of a referendum, and should not be exploited for political purposes.

Ongoing devastation in the Hunter Region

By **REMY KOZARY, RAYNA LAMACK and ISOBELLE PROCTOR**

NEWCASTLE residents are still experiencing hardship following the April storms earlier this year. From April 20 to 22, the Hunter Region, Central Coast and Sydney regions experienced strong, destructive "cyclonic winds" and torrential rainfall. Newcastle and the Hunter were lashed with the worst of this brutal storm, with winds gusting up to 135 km/h.

Chaos swept through the Hunter and Newcastle was declared a natural disaster zone. Bridges collapsed, roads were washed away and homes were destroyed or severely damaged. Violent weather forced families to stay at home and hills were reduced to small islands where cattle huddled to get away from the flood water.

This storm was the most significant since the 2007 Pasha Bulker. Over 80 schools were closed due to safety concerns and around 100,000 houses, hospitals, schools and businesses were without power for three plus days. Some went without water. With more than 4500 urgent hazards in Newcastle, residents were warned that it would take several days to get their power back. The SES rescued 47 people from rooftops and flood water across Newcastle. Despite the efforts of emergency services, many people are still experiencing



Many homes were cut off by floodwaters during the April super storm. Some are still recovering. *Picture: Darren Pateman*

difficulty several months on.

Mrs and Mr Kozary from Black Hill described the damage to their home. "There was a very strong wind blowing and suddenly there was a loud smash and our bedroom window had broken and a crash followed and a tree landed on our carport". A significant aftermath

followed the storm. "We couldn't sleep in the bedroom until the window was taped and boarded up. We had no power for a prolonged period of time which meant no telephone, water or cooking." The window has been fixed but only part of the tree has been removed and is an ongoing procedure.

Local athlete internationally recognised

By **SAM ANGELOV and JARRAD RILEY**

STEPHANIE Scigala, a year 9 student at Callaghan College Wallsend Campus, has been busy making an international name for herself.

Miss Scigala recently competed in the International Children's Games (ICG) - a global athletic event open to people between 12 and 15 years.

The most recent games were held at Lake Macquarie with individual events taking place at the

Hunter Sports Centre in Glendale.

Miss Scigala participated in the 100-metre sprint and shot-put and placed third in the finals. She said that participation was a valuable experience. "It was definitely a challenge and I met a lot of people from different countries and made new friends."

Miss Scigala trains for shot-put around six hours per week.

She now has set her sights on the World Children's Games to be held next year in Russia.



Stephanie Scigala is reaching for the stars.

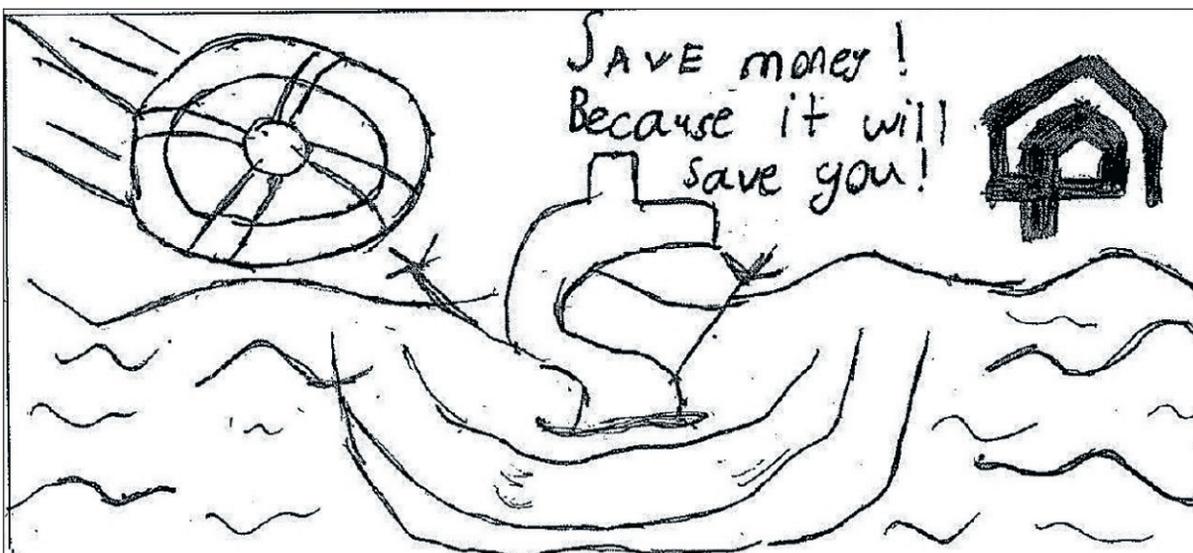
Picture: Sam Angelov

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