For the purpose of this paper the term “rainbow people” is used in the most inclusive terms to encompass the diversity of people whose experiences make up the LGBTIQ* communities.

The University of Sydney Ally Network wishes to express its strong support for marriage equality in Australia. The Network believes all consenting adults should have equal rights to participate in the institution of marriage if they so choose. The requirement that marriage be between a man and a woman does not reflect contemporary Australian values of respect, dignity and equality under the law or the University’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. The current restrictions represent discrimination enshrined in law which cannot be the basis of a free and equal society. Such laws formally reinforce a perception of some citizens as being less deserving of access to a full range of rights and responsibilities. This harms rainbow people and those who share their lives as partners, friends and family. Harming some citizens to the preference or advantage of others harms all members of Australian society. This is a matter of civil and human rights.

The Ally Network recognises that the experiences of rainbow people encompass multiple perspectives on the idea of marriage as an institution. The Network also recognises the diversity and intersectionality of experiences and identities that exist within rainbow communities. Whilst the concept of marriage is not unanimously embraced by all members of the rainbow community or the wider Australian community, the right to be able to be legally married for all couples is widely supported and accepted. Community polls indicate that acceptance of same-sex couples right to be married is over 60%.

Rainbow people are a vital part of Australian life and contribute to Australian society in a multitude of ways and their right to be married under the law should be celebrated not denied. Being silent on this issue is not acceptable, inaction on this issue is not acceptable, having our laws codify discrimination is not acceptable. The result harms us all. But it harms some more than others. Young rainbow people often learn early that their lives and loves are not considered viable or valuable by society and as a consequence have above average rates of mental illness and suicide. A study has found that 16% of young people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Intersex or Queer (LGBTIQ) have attempted suicide and 33% have harmed themselves as a result of widespread homophobic and transphobic harassment and violence in Australian society. These same young people have no say in this survey.

Rainbow people and their communities of support are extraordinarily resilient but are rightly worried that a non-compulsory, non-binding $122 million dollar postal survey will unleash small but confronting pockets of community prejudice, media vitriol and personal vilification. We are already seeing the hateful voices of the few amplified to sell newspapers and increase website traffic, funded by the ‘no’ case. This cowardly approach to governing erodes the quality of public discourse on this issue, fans discrimination and makes the lives and wellbeing of rainbow people into a political punching bag. The current marriage law and the proposed postal survey formalise prejudice that contravenes the spirit of Australian society and law. Whilst people may hold and espouse views in favour of narrow
definitions of marriage, and may do so based on cherished religious and social beliefs, this activity increases community tensions and discrimination against rainbow people. It is also without precedent for this issue; there was no such ‘consultation’ when the Marriage Act was amended by the Liberal government in 2004 limiting the definition to the ‘union of a man and a woman’.

This current ‘consultation’ activity is particularly futile given that it is non-binding and likely to be non-representative. A postal survey is likely to exclude many people from ‘having a say’ especially those from transient and homeless populations, those that move frequently, are in remote locations, have limited access to technology or the ability to update their details or respond in the short timeframe. Lowered rates of participation, particularly along age and location lines, is a known by-product of this postal approach. A by-product that clearly undermines the stated intention of the postal survey to canvas the views of all ‘eligible’ Australians on the issue.

The postal survey has become as controversial an issue as marriage equality, functioning as a tactic of delay and distraction in the disguise of democratic process. The Ally Network calls on representatives of the Australian government to fulfil their role as elected officials. Govern on marriage equality. Vote in favour of marriage equality, both because polls show a majority of Australians support this approach and because you have duty to remove discrimination under the law. Do it now and don’t waste $122 million dollars on a flawed and dangerous opinion poll.

The Ally Network is committed to working with staff and students, including our international students, and the broader rainbow community to counteract the negative effects of this campaign. We must ensure that the University of Sydney is a safe place for staff, students and the broader community – a place free from hate speech with access to additional support and services available for anyone who might be adversely affected by this process.

We condemn this postal survey but encourage everyone to participate and vote ‘yes’. Yes to equality of love under the law. Change is coming. We have to create it.

On behalf of the University of Sydney Ally Network,

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