



**MID-YEAR GATHERING**

The Autumn Gathering for 2022, our first face to face get together for several years, will be held in the New South Wales coastal resort of PORT MACQUARIE. The dates set are from 1<sup>st</sup> till 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022. The venue will be the Northpoint Apartments located right in the CBD of Port Macquarie and on the beautiful Hastings River.

We have negotiated excellent prices for the weekend which should please all who attend. We have available 1 (2 only) bedroom, 2 bedroom and 3 bedroom apartments. You can reach Port Macquarie via the Pacific Highway from Sydney. Fly into Port Macquarie from Mascot Airport, Sydney. If you are into a train journey you alight from your travel beast at beautiful Wauchope and are then transported into Port Macquarie.

BOOKNG FORM will be on the website very soon. We look forward to seeing you on the last weekend in March in awesome Port Macquarie.

Regards  
**Jeffrey P. Sproal**  
 Conference Co-ordinator.

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## EDITORIAL



It is with some nostalgia that I present this, my last newsletter in my 85th year. In this concluding edition I would like to thank the many colleagues who have either submitted articles or have directly helped with the presentation.

I started as an editorial assistant to Cliff Moores who edited the newsletter for an extraordinary period of nine years. I wrote an occasional editorial and also edited many of the reports by the various State Coordinators. This was before the introduction of an Events Coordinator for the entire country. Then, each State Coordinator's report mentioned future events in that State and described those which had taken place since the previous edition. My submissions to Cliff were all prepared in Microsoft Word, which converts naturally into Microsoft Publisher, the format for the newsletter.

With a daughter in Paris, I was travelling too much to take over the editorship alone and proposed doing each alternate issue. I bought a copy of Microsoft Publisher and started playing around with it, needing support from Cliff and Neil Warner. In fact, I have continued to call upon them to help solve thorny problems. At this stage, Neil joined me as co-editor and continued in this role for several years. However, as President then Secretary he was overloaded, and I took over as sole editor. The onset of Covid in 2020 meant that there were no conflicts with being abroad when issues were due!

In addition of the support from Neil and Cliff, I would like to recognise some of the many members who submitted articles over my years as editor, meaning that I didn't need to include too many articles from *Star Observer*! Michael Sweetnam ('Irish Michael') submitted excellent film reviews, including art house movies. When living in Sydney, he was accessible to all the main movie houses. Probably the most prolific submitter of articles during my editorship was Herbert Compton from Brisbane. He not only included descriptions of his gay life and experiences abroad, but sent me cuttings from magazine articles of interest to our members. In fact, without his contributions, many issues of the newsletter would have been too dependent upon the *Star Observer*. It is descriptions of the varied life experiences of our members which resonate the most. Of course, Cliff and Neil were responsible for submitting a lot of material. Cliff was the main communicator of events among our very active WA contingent, as well as contributing articles about experiences together with his partner Richard. Several others responded to my call for personal articles. This included David Braden who not only submitted personal articles but

gave visions of Sri Lanka which have inspired many of us to plan going there with him as friend and travel guide. Neal Drinnan provided a moving tribute upon the death of Mal Cosh. There are too many others to name individually who have contributed over the years, but I always appreciated their efforts.

Where to now? No volunteer has yet come forward to take over the editorship. One option is to have two co-editors, each delivering 3 issues per year. Perhaps the reluctance to come forward is due to unfamiliarity with Publisher? However, a decent version of the newsletter could be produced using Word. A Word version could provide a stepping stone to a future Publisher version. The only significant penalty would be the inability to flexibly insert pictures into text, but we could live with that. We do have other forms of communication among members, including the Facebook page hosted by Bernie Gregory and the Zoom sessions hosted by John Conway and Neil Warner. Whilst these have been a wonderful resource, especially during Covid, each only accesses a relatively small proportion of our members. In contrast, the newsletter is available to everyone, including those without internet access. Thus, it will be missed. But, unless someone comes forward, this will be the final issue!

It is great news that we are gradually opening up from our Covid blues. This is especially true for those of us in NSW or Victoria. The cases are still rather high in Victoria, but seem to be stabilising. The States have been doing the heavy lifting during this pandemic. That's why it is disheartening to see some Federal politicians blaming their States to create party-political capital. Let's hope that this subsides as hospitalisations decrease and booster shots commence.

We can look forward now to our mid-year meeting in Port Macquarie. Also, Neil Warner has organised an excursion to Bright in Victoria for both Victorian and NSW members. Our events calendar, so long dormant, is re-activating. Real contacts among members are replacing virtual contacts. We are all hoping that the Omicron Variant will not reduce the freedoms which we are coming to enjoy.

Finally, I have enjoyed my roles, firstly as co-editor and later editor of this newsletter. I hope it will continue, even if in a different form. I thank members for being tolerant of any unrecognised biases which I might have. We live in a world where acceptance of ourselves as gay men cannot ever be taken for granted. This inevitably has a political dimension. I hope that 2022 will turn out to be a more relaxing and happy year for us all.

**John Roy (Mallacoota)**



**FROM THE PRESIDENT**



This is my final article for the Newsletter in my role as President. I have decided to stand down from the committee and hand the reins over to someone else. It has been my absolute pleasure to lead the group and committee. I cannot believe that it is almost December again; this year has certainly been an interesting year for us all in many ways.

It has certainly been another challenging year for us all, but our resilience and our willingness to adapt to change has shown our strength and our ability to cope with the challenges of these uncertain times.

As was the case last year, everything we once took for granted was tested, changed and we have all been faced with many challenges. The way we conducted our lives, our work habits, our interactions with our families and friends

and our community, all were changed yet again.

Country Network throughout all of this has still been an important social group across Australia where we have been able to support our members, be there for them and hold events whenever we could during 2021.

We might not have had our Mid-Year Gathering or AGM weekend, but I know many members have reached out to other members in many different ways throughout the year, which was awesome to see. I know my phone bills show it, as I made many calls to members to see how they were going and coping during the year. But this is what Country Network is all about, being there for each other, supporting each other and generally caring for our fellow man.

Hopefully we can all get together in 2022 and see each other in person at Mid-Year Gathering and at our AGM weekend.

I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and safe and Happy New Year.

**Big Hugs Charlie ☺**

I will see if we can both get to the Mid-Year Gathering (hopefully!!). If there's ever anything planned for Orange, let me know - we run the only LGBTQI friendly/safe venue in Orange, with regular drag competitions, pride nights and just damn good fun for grown ups (we try to keep young bogan types well away from here !).

**John V and Kevin  
The Blind Pig Cocktail Bar and Sound Lounge, Orange**



## DOMINIC PERROTTET QUESTIONS NEED FOR SCOTT MORRISON'S RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION BILL



Prime Minister Scott Morrison's Religious Discrimination Bill is now facing opposition from the States. After Victoria indicated that they may challenge provisions of the controversial Bill, NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet has questioned the need for Morrison's showpiece legislation for the religious right. "We haven't needed it (religious discrimination bill) for over a 100 years. Why now?" asked Perrottet during an interview on Sky News Australia.

Morrison had personally introduced the Religious Discrimination Bill in Parliament on November 23. The Bill includes a protection for "statements of belief". Health practitioners and teachers could make anti-LGBTQI statements on social media and will not face any disciplinary action from professional bodies. The Bill also allows faith-based schools, and institutions like hospitals, and aged care facilities to only employ faith-based staff, provided they have publicly stated the criteria.

### 'A Man Of Faith'

Sky News Australia's Political Editor Andrew Clennell asked the NSW Premier whether as "a man of faith" he supported what Morrison was trying to do with the bill and whether it should go further. A devout Catholic, Perrottet replied that he had "always been pretty hesitant in relation to legislation like this. I think when you're going down a path where you have the Parliament legislating freedom, well, that can cause a lot of challenges and there can be a future government that then can legislate to take those freedoms away," said Perrottet.

Perrottet comes from the conservative faction of the Liberal Party. His record on LGBTQI rights has been dominated by his positions in the past against gay marriage and opposition to the use of gender-neutral pronouns. During the 2017 Marriage Equality national vote, he supported the plebiscite, and opposed a change in the definition of marriage. "Marriage is about every child's fundamental right to grow up with their own mum and dad," he had said. However, since taking over as Premier in October 2021, Perrottet has vowed to protect the LGBTQI community from injustice and discrimination. His government also accepted the recommendation of a bipartisan committee and ordered a judicial inquiry into historical anti-gay and anti-trans hate crimes in Sydney.

### The Wedding Cake Example

Perrottet seemed to indicate that the fears of the 'No' side during the plebiscite had not been based on facts. "I remember during the same-sex marriage debate, there was a lot of discussion at the time about how people are going to get discriminated here and discriminated there. The wedding cake example, that the Christian bakers would have to close their businesses. None of that in fact, eventuated," pointed out Perrottet. "We've got to be careful here in terms of rushing into legislation in this space. It hasn't been relevant," said the Premier, adding, "If you've got a situation where there's general bipartisan support, that's a positive thing and that would give me some encouragement, that they've got it right." Last week, according to The Age, Victorian Attorney-General Jaelyn Symes did not rule out a legal challenge to the Religious Discrimination Bill in the High Court to defend the state's anti-discrimination laws. The Victorian Parliament is currently debating amendments to the state's Equal Opportunity laws to remove the exemptions granted to religious schools that allowed them to fire staff for being LGBTQI.

### Bill Will Override State Anti-Discrimination Laws

*The Bill would prevent faith-based schools and organisations from discriminating against LGBTQ+ students, staff and people who rely on their services.*

Conservative Christian organisations have been demanding a federal law to override strong anti-discrimination laws in states like Victoria and Tasmania. Evie Potter, Co-Convenor of the Victorian Pride Lobby, said that the bill seemed designed to specifically target states like Victoria. Anna Brown, CEO of Equality Australia, said that the bill would bolster "the ability of religious schools to refuse to hire staff that do not affirm or support them" "What constitutes discrimination today, will be lawful tomorrow, allowing people to say harmful, insulting and demeaning things. Things like a medical worker telling a person living with HIV that AIDS is a punishment from God, or a person living with disability that their disability is caused by the devil," Brown had said.

Shibu Thomas, Nov 29, 2021, *Star Observer*



## *Vale Ed Summerbell*



Ed was a long-standing, well respected member of Country Network. His gentle, kind nature veiled a mischievous character that endeared him to many. He remains an inspiration to many for living his life to its fullest capacity. He will be sadly missed. RIP Eddie.

Thank you to **Valery and Chris** for the photo; taken at the 2011 Country Network AGM

## **West Gippsland Australia Day BBQ**

Once again, **Phillip G** is opening his house to members and guests to enjoy a fun, relaxed day around the BBQ. BYO Meat, drinks and chair.

Australia Day, Jan 26 12:00pm. 13 Langford St Moe.

RSVP Phillip 0417 738 406 E: langdongoode@gmail.com

*ANYONE FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC?*

Any of you who would like an occasional change from the main classical music broadcasters may stream a classical music program from 2 to 4pm on Sunday afternoons on [www.3mgb.org.au](http://www.3mgb.org.au). The program is presented on alternate Sundays by our outgoing editor **John Roy** (with his colleague **Lester Sturgess** presenting on the other Sunday). The program comes from Mallacoota, Vic and covers a wide variety of music.

