

# **LGB** ALLIANCE AUSTRALIA

**Re: Lesbian Action Group temporary exemption**

To: [legal@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:legal@humanrights.gov.au)

LGB Alliance Australia writes to express our support for the application by the Lesbian Action Group for a temporary five-year exemption under the Sex Discrimination Act: ‘For a lesbians born female only event to celebrate International Lesbian Day’ at the Victorian Pride Centre.

[LGB Alliance Australia](#) is Australia’s largest organisation advocating solely for the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. Our vision is that lesbians, gay men and bisexuals live free from discrimination or disadvantage based on their sexual orientation.

This matter speaks to the second of our [four objectives](#) as an organisation: ‘To highlight the dual discrimination faced by lesbians.’ We amplify the voices of lesbians and highlight the dual discrimination experienced by lesbians as women who are same-sex attracted in a male-dominated society.

Lesbians are a very small minority – possibly less [than 2%](#) of the female population. Once, lesbians in Victoria had a thriving community, but over the past couple of decades it has all but disappeared. The ‘[Lost Lesbian Spaces](#)’ project of LGB Alliance Australia maps the lesbian events, venues and organised public groups that used to exist in Victoria – once, more than 100 – and compares them with what is available now: only two existing spaces or organisations are exclusively for lesbians.

Nor can lesbians count on safe and welcoming online spaces. As LGB Alliance Australia has also discussed, there are [no lesbian-only dating apps](#) available, meaning that lesbians must look for dates in online environments that are overwhelmingly heterosexual and full of men. Sexual harassment of lesbians in these online spaces is common, and lesbians who complain risk being excluded.

It is very reasonable that lesbians would wish to rebuild a community in order to socialise and find partners and friends in a safe, welcoming, in-person space.

Lesbians are women who are attracted to other women only – i.e. female homosexuals. This attraction is experienced on the basis of sex – not on the basis of someone’s self-declared ‘gender identity’. A biological male, whatever his legal status and whatever he calls himself, is not a lesbian and is not sexually attractive to lesbians. It should not be deemed ‘discriminatory’ or ‘hateful’ to recognise this fact. And lesbians should not be discriminated against because they do not hold male persons sexually compatible or attractive.

Women who choose to socialise in a lesbian-only space are making it clear that they want to be around other females only, in an intimate environment: a space where a woman can

seek a sexual partner or be openly affectionate with an existing partner. Entering such a space can be a vulnerable, deeply personal step for a woman. For some women – particularly those who are newly ‘out’ or who have suffered sexual abuse or domestic violence – it takes great courage to enter that environment.

When a male knowingly intrudes into that lesbian space, he is behaving aggressively and crossing a clear boundary that women have set. In many instances, his behaviour could reasonably be considered an act of sexual harassment.

If authorities use the threat of legal or financial penalties to force lesbians to tolerate such behaviour, it would be hard to see this as anything other than the institutionalising of sexual harassment. Lesbians should not have to tolerate unwanted male attention as a pre-condition of finding sexual partners and friends.

Furthermore, when lesbian gatherings are made to admit males (however they identify), it not only threatens the women's safety and dignity and erodes their personal boundaries; it also weakens the community they have built, which they are forced to compromise or dilute in order to make space for men. The lesbian-only events of past decades enabled women to engage in a rich variety of cultural and political activities and to build an extensive, cohesive community. But recently, that vibrant Victorian lesbian community has virtually vanished. For lesbians who wish to gather nowadays, covert private friendship groups are the only option.

Lesbians met secretly ‘in the shadows’, in fear of the authorities, for too many years. They should not have to do so in 2023.

There are innumerable ‘queer’ and ‘LGBTIQA+’ venues and events where females and males of all sorts may socialise together if they wish. But lesbians, as small and isolated minority group, should be free to create our own activities and environments without interference or punishment.

We would be glad to discuss this matter further with you.