

## A tolerant island

A couple of decades ago two gay blokes moved to Tasmania from the mainland and subsequently opened a restaurant. They chose the name Rockerfeller's. Lively lads these two; they were sophisticated, "with it" and "openly gay". Their familiar, calculatedly insulting welcomes like "Oh no, not you again!" or "I suppose you must want something or you wouldn't be here!" have, by now, charmed a couple of generations of enthusiastic gourmets.

The Tasmanian society they moved into still had its homophobes – many of them – if the truth were known. And the legal system then was probably Dickensian in the way it treated gays. There was still a law that could send gay people to jail for 21 years – a law that was not repealed until 1997. It is worth recalling that the premier of the day declared in 1988 that gays were "not welcome" in the state.

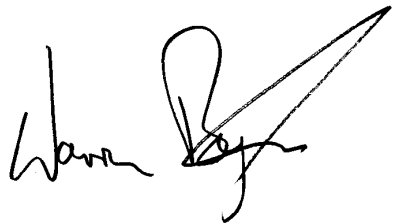
These issues are critically examined by Rodney Croome in the opinion column in this issue.

As we move into the twenty-first century we Tasmanians can assert with

pride that we live in a democracy more tolerant than at any time in our history: a place where you can live, work and seek fulfilment with a minimum of persecution, legal, social or otherwise, and enjoy the personal and economic benefits that flow from these conditions.

As for Rockerfeller's, it's still a place to which I take people from out-of-state and overseas, confident that I will receive my traditional "insult" accompanying their excellent food and wine. Although Ian and Gary are a bit disappointed these days. By their own admission they once quite enjoyed their celebrity status when people were vying to befriend them specifically to demonstrate an overt lack of homophobia. Now they are just Tasmanians! And the phrase "openly gay" has no meaning to people like my kids. Their friends are just their mates – no qualification required.

I think it's splendid.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Ryan". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long, sweeping line extending from the end of the name.