

STRICKER AND PHELPS TURN RABBIS AROUND

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There are positive signs Australia's Reform Jewish rabbinate will follow the lead of their progressive American counterparts in approving same-sex marriages. Jackie Stricker, who married her partner Dr Kerry Phelps in a much-publicised Jewish ceremony in New York in 1998, told *Sydney Star Observer* "definitely the door's not shut" despite recent reports in the Jewish community press.

Stricker told the *Star* she and Phelps had recently met with progressive rabbis about the issue. "I'd say that they're open to argument,"

she said and affirmed that she and Phelps would definitely continue to follow up the issue. "We're not going to let it go."

On 29 March the US-based reform group, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, voted by an overwhelming majority to allow ceremonies, including weddings, for same-sex couples. The conference's resolution stated "the relationship of a Jewish same-gender couple is worthy of affirmation through Jewish ritual".

However, the *Australian Jewish News* (14 April 2000) reported that a 10-year-old statement of the Council of Progressive Rabbis of

Australia and New Zealand supporting "heterosexual, monogamous, procreative marriage" remained "the official position", according to Council chair Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins. The *Jewish News* said although Australian reform rabbis were set to discuss the same-sex marriage issue at their May conference the position was unlikely to change.

Stricker said she and Phelps were concerned about these reports and had sought a meeting with reform rabbis last week. She said the rabbis had listened carefully to their arguments and agreed to rethink the issue. "It is our belief the matter will be fur-

ther discussed at the May conference by the rabbis. They said it would be definitely on the agenda with a view to referring the matter for consideration by the lay community. Our hope is that the Australian reform rabbinate will follow the lead of their American colleagues."

The recent surge of interest in issues relating to gay and lesbian Jews in Australia has led a new Jewish Australian internet discussion group being formed. OzGayJews (named similarly to the US-based GAYJEWS list) can be contacted at www.egroups.com/group/ozgayjews. Membership of the group is confidential.