

Poles but no polarisation to support needs of faith

to the point
April 1

ONE morning the King invited four blind men to describe an elephant.

The first ran his hand along its trunk and replied that an elephant was like a branch. The second felt the tail and said it was like a rope.

The third touched a leg and said it was like a tree.

The fourth felt its side – and concluded that an elephant was like a wall.

The point is clear: Many people have been drawing conclusions regarding an issue concerning members of the Jewish community without grasping the full picture.

For some months we have witnessed heated debate – in this newspaper, in mainstream media, in the streets of this peaceful corner of the universe – over a proposal whose ramifications are at the same time significant, yet negligible; major, yet a non-event.

What's it about and why the paradox? Simply put, there is a plan on the table to construct an eruv in St Ives. Barely visible to the casual observer, it will comprise a series of tall poles attached by a one-centimetre-thick stretch of wire.

Eighty-five per cent of them are in place in the form of Energy-Australia and Foxtel poles.

That's it. Why is it significant? Because the poles and the wire are symbolic. There is no boundary; there is no enclosure. The poles create a virtual area within which observant Jewish mothers with young children can push prams on the Sabbath.

They make it possible for elderly people who require sticks or wheelchairs to take a walk on the Sabbath. They assist Jews to observe the requirements of their faith, while being part of society.

Where is the paradox?

It lies in the fact that this can happen without anyone else noticing any difference. As essential as an eruv is to observant Jews, it has minimal impact on the streetscape, negligible effect on the environment, zero impact on the suburb itself. How many of us have enjoyed a leisurely stroll along the Bondi beachfront on a balmy Sunday afternoon?

How many of us are aware that we have done so within an eruv that has been in place since 2002?

That's the point. It's a non-event to most of us – yet has enormous positive impact on the lives of



MINIMAL IMPACT: NSW Jewish Board of Deputies chief executive officer Vic Alhadeff asks how many people have noticed the eruv at Bondi, which was installed in 2002.

FOR THE RECORD

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fellow Australians who seek nothing more than to observe the requirements of their faith.

Waverley Mayor Sally Betts informed me last week that she has fielded just one objection regarding the Bondi eruv.

The issue was discussed and then resolved.

She has written to Ku-ring-gai Council to express support for a St Ives eruv, based on her experience.

Over 200 eruvs exist in cities around the world.

These range from Venice and Vancouver to Manchester and Manhattan; from London, England, and London, Ontario, to Melbourne

and Perth. Johannesburg has nine while Florida has 19.

There has been consultation, there has been negotiation, but with goodwill and understanding, the residents of these cities carry on unfazed, untroubled.

This is not about forming enclosures or separating people from each other.

The reverse, in fact.

It's about enabling people to get out and mix while respecting their distinctive cultures and faiths.

Isn't that what Australia is so proudly, and rightly, all about?

Vic Alhadeff
chief executive officer,
NSW Jewish Board of Deputies.

■ SUPER contributions are already compulsory for small businesses if the owners pay themselves a wage or salary ("Self-employed need super too", *Times*, March 30). Without salary payments to principals, a business is not sustainable. The problem is that there are tax disincentives to do so and massive tax disincentives for growth in the PAYG system – it is madness to tax profits (which are made annually) in advance. The problem for small business owners is not superannuation, it is the cash flow impost placed on growth (ie profit growth) by the tax system.

Andrew Thoseby
online comment

■ CONGRATULATIONS to Premier Barry O'Farrell on such a decisive and historic victory. It could be said that Barry is now the most powerful Premier in NSW history. With such a victory, it will be wonderful to see some real long-term vision, planning and action for this state, rather than short-term opportunism focused on four-year electoral cycles, as has been the case in the past. On the local front, it will be nice if we can take a break from the massive unit development that has been pushed onto Ku-ring-gai by the previous state government. With about 6000 new unit dwellings now built or approved in Ku-ring-gai in the past five years, this area has taken more than its fair share over that time.

Peter Armstrong
North Turramurra

■ "NEW NSW". LOL this publication's definition of new is very, very loose. Labor or Liberal, either way it's gonna be more same old, same old. Nothing will change and I hope it doesn't. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

Azza9
online comment

■ GRANDPA always said "the grass is always greener on the other side of the septic tank" ("Grass is greener at Gordon", *Times*, March 30).

Simple
online comment

■ YOU'RE next, Gillard. Start packing your bags.

Columbo
online comment

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