

John Howard kickstarts No SSM case

John Howard says it was disingenuous for the Yes campaign to argue that changing the law to include same-sex marriage did not affect other rights.

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- Political Editor, Canberra

John Howard has called for proposed same-sex marriage legislation, including full protections for parents, religion and free speech, to be produced before the postal survey vote closes in November, as he launches his support for the No campaign.

The former prime minister said yesterday it was disingenuous for the Yes campaign to argue that changing the law to include same-sex marriage did not affect other rights and that the survey involved a simple yes/no question.

“I respect the Yes campaign arguments, but this is not about a single right and there are conflicting rights,” Mr Howard told *The Weekend Australian* yesterday.

Mr Howard, who was prime minister in 2004 when the definition of marriage being between “a man and a woman” was inserted into the Marriage Act, said yesterday there could not be changes to social institutions without wider consequences.

“I believe there is a conflict here between those seeking the right for same-sex marriage and the rights of the child, and I believe the right of the child to have a mother and father should be preserved,” he said.

The Liberal Party’s elder statesman praised Malcolm Turnbull for being “correct and courageous” in standing by the Coalition election pledge to hold a plebiscite on same-sex marriage.

But he warned the government that proposed protections for other rights needed to be produced before people finished voting in November because “scant regard” would be paid to them if the Yes vote succeeded and the legislation was rushed through before Christmas.

John Anderson, who was deputy prime minister and Nationals leader when the marriage definition was inserted in 2004 with the support of the ALP, said yesterday there needed to be protections spelt out for freedom of religion and speech.

“Why should we have any confidence that parliament can deliver the guarantees and protections that we so need in the areas of parents’ rights, of free speech, and of freedom of conscience and belief?” Mr Anderson said in a video for Liberals and Nationals for Marriage.

The two leaders acted after the High Court on Thursday validated the postal survey on same-sex marriage and as the government, Labor, the Greens and Yes and No campaigners negotiated rules for plebiscite advertising and debate.

The Prime Minister, in Samoa, yesterday called for a respectful debate and said Labor “didn’t want to do anything” about rules for the debate until after the “7-0” High Court decision.

Mathias Cormann, acting Special Minister of State and Finance Minister, said yesterday: “We want this process to be fair to both sides of this argument and for Australians to have the opportunity to have their say in an appropriate environment.”

Bill Shorten said regulations were needed to stop gay people being subjected to “vile” and “hurtful” speech. “In saying that you’re allowed to disagree, it shouldn’t give licence to every bit of vile, hurtful speech that you can make,” the Opposition Leader said. “We do need to regulate it so that we have some more decent debate than I think we’re seeing at the margins,” Mr Shorten said.

Mr Howard said normal rules for election campaigns would help with advertising during the same-sex debate but anything trying to limit freedom of speech further would be “undemocratic”.

There were minor scuffles in Brisbane on Thursday night when gay activists surrounded a church, doctors opposed to same-sex marriage have been accused of “racism” and activists this week sought to have a Sydney GP deregistered for appearing in a No campaign television advertisement.

Mr Howard was concerned about the actions taken against doctors. He said there were “always consequences if the definition is changed of a social institution”.

“The more that I hear the Yes campaign say it is a simple yes-or-no vote, the more the public is entitled to become suspicious,” the former prime minister said.

“Importantly, people are entitled to know there are sufficient protections for people affected by those changes and the public is entitled to know what those protections are. Any political party that said they were going to spend \$50 billion on road construction but would give the details after they were elected would be laughed out of court.

“It is not sufficient just to say no priest or rabbi or imam will be forced to perform a same-sex marriage ceremony; you expect that as an absolute minimum.”

Mr Howard said there had already been experiences in Australia and overseas where other rights such as parental rights, freedom of religion and freedom of speech had been challenged.

“There is a wider agenda that many of the Yes campaign advocates have which goes beyond marriage,” he said.

Mr Howard said the Marriage Act had not previously defined marriage as being between a man and a woman because “it hadn’t occurred to society or the parliament” there was an alternative.

“On the substance of the matter, I am a No voter and the principal argument for that relates to children and there is clear evidence that you have better outcomes overall for children who have a biological mother and father,” he said. “I recognise that there are homosexual couples who are caring and conscientious parents who do a good job and there are plenty of

neglectful heterosexual parents. But the clear evidence is that you have outcomes that are superior for children in the longer term if they have a mother and a father.”

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/samesex-marriage-survey-john-howard-kickstarts-the-no-case/news-story/da6ca4cc0e4bc5c6aebda25a753917ba>