

# Howard ramps up attack on Turnbull

Joe Kelly  
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Malcolm Turnbull is facing a deepening divide within the Liberal Party over same-sex marriage after John Howard ratcheted up his criticisms of the government, accusing it of “washing its hands” of any responsibility to protect parental rights, free speech and religious freedoms.

Mr Howard said it was an abrogation of responsibility and “disingenuous” for the government not to address the “legitimate concerns” of Australians about the legal protections that were needed to accompany same-sex marriage.

The former prime minister, who launched his campaign for a No vote in *The Weekend Australian* on Saturday, warned that in the face of these concerns the government response had been to “wash its hands of any responsibility”. He said existing protections for religious institutions were under assault and could be further unpicked by a future Labor government.

His intervention was backed yesterday by Tony Abbott and echoed by a group of senior - lawyers.

The sharpening of the attack highlights a deepening rift within the conservative side of politics over the conduct of the postal survey and whether religious freedoms are adequately protected.

Senior conservatives including Scott Morrison, Peter Dutton and Mathias Cormann refused to respond to Mr Howard’s criticism, while Coalition MPs in support of same-sex marriage sought to counter his claims.

The conservative leaders within Mr Turnbull’s team have consistently declined to detail how protections would be legislated if laws were passed to introduce same-sex marriage.

In his statement yesterday, Mr Howard said: “It is important for the government to spell out, in advance of the vote, what steps it will take to protect parental rights, freedom of speech and religious freedom in the event of same-sex marriage becoming law. The case for these protections is compelling ... It is completely disingenuous to assert that a change of this magnitude to a fundamental social institution does not have consequences. This issue must be addressed before the survey is completed.

“Thus far, the government’s response has been to wash its hands of any responsibility, merely stating that it will facilitate a private member’s bill.”

Mr Howard’s view is that the debate on same-sex marriage is akin to the republic debate, when ministers including Peter Costello, then treasurer, were free to express their opinions while also performing their day jobs.

Mr Howard and Mr Abbott were also united in their defence of the monarchy during the 1999 republic referendum.

The criticism from Mr Howard came shortly after the parliamentary launch of the Yes campaign for Liberals and Nationals, with supporters of same-sex marriage playing down fears that any change to the definition of marriage would impinge on other freedoms.

Education Minister Simon Birmingham said current provisions for faith-based schools would “in no way be changed by either this postal survey or any of the legislation that’s come before the parliament which would enact marriage equality”.

Attorney-General George Brandis argued that religious freedoms would be protected under “very thorough” measures in any bill.

Revenue and Financial Services Minister Kelly O’Dwyer said “religious institutions should always be able to have the ability to determine who they marry”.

Other Coalition MPs backed Mr Howard’s comments. Mr Abbott said it was incumbent on those calling for change to identify the broader consequences of same-sex marriage.

“At the moment they can’t or won’t or they’re arguing among themselves about it behind closed doors,” Mr Abbott told radio 2GB. “If you don’t know, vote No because people don’t know exactly what is going to come in the wake of this change.”

West Australian Liberal Andrew Hastie said Mr Howard was “spot on” and there were “consequences to redefining marriage”.

“We must have provisions to protect freedom of speech, religion and parental rights if the Yes vote prevails,” he said. “To pretend otherwise is to ignore the experience of the US, UK and Canada.”

Labor’s legal affairs spokesman Mark Dreyfus attacked Mr Howard’s claim that Labor would examine the exemptions from provisions of anti-discrimination legislation currently enjoyed by religious institutions.

“Mr Howard’s allegation is completely false,” he said. “He should stick to the question at hand: whether same-sex couples should have the right to marry. This is nothing but a scare campaign from the No camp.”

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/samesex-marriage-howard-ramps-up-attack-on-turnbull/news-story/48788bb602e0ad1109831a68fc8cf183>

# Great fraud of postal survey exposed

- The Australian
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- [Paul Kelly](#)



Editor-At-Large, Sydney

John Howard [has called out](#) the great fraud of the same-sex marriage vote.

This is about far bigger issues than just changes to marriage law, with religious freedoms being put at risk by an irresponsible political class.

In the process, the former prime minister has launched an assault on the Turnbull government with a lethal charge — that it misleads the Australian people and fails to honour the values the Liberal Party is supposed to uphold.

Howard warns a Yes victory will lead to the erosion of already inadequate religious freedoms. In a considered statement, he accused the government of seeking “to wash its hands of any responsibility” for the essential protections needed after the ballot if the Yes camp prevails.

His message is blunt: the religious protection issue must be confronted before the vote, the position the Turnbull government utterly rejects. While Howard is too smart to use the word “betrayal”, his branding of the Yes case champions as “completely disingenuous” leaves nobody in doubt about the gravity of the situation.

Howard also punctured the absurd pretences of senior Coalition and Labor figures that legalisation of same-sex marriage will not have far wider ramifications. With the Greens pledged to attacking religious freedom exemptions and senior LGBTI figures campaigning for the Safe Schools program to be made compulsory after the vote, the assurances offered by the Yes camp simply defy credibility.

John Howard. Picture: Richard Dobson

Howard is not just attacking the Liberal Party. His critique applies to all Yes case advocates who argue religious freedoms will be protected when they have failed singularly to advance or explain how this will happen.

The Labor Party is in the forefront of this fraud. But Howard’s criticism applies with force to the Turnbull government and touches an underlying sentiment — that the government just wants the issue off the agenda as soon as possible for electoral reasons.

The former PM says it is vital the government spell out before the vote what protections it envisages for parental rights, freedom of speech and religious freedom. Given the experience in Britain, the US and Canada, Howard says this has become a “compelling” obligation. His advice to the Turnbull government is unpalatable but Howard is correct.

In an unmistakable warning that this is an imperative issue for the Liberal Party, Howard says failure to spell this out equates to saying these issues do not matter: that is, religious and parental freedom does not matter.

The government’s insistence that its responsibility only involves freedom protections in relation to the wedding ceremony is increasingly recognised as deceptive and inadequate. The real issue is protections for institutions and individuals in the wider society.

This is where the impact of same-sex marriage will be felt.

The significance of Howard’s comments is the pressure they will put on leading conservatives in the Turnbull cabinet who back the No case but so far have been silent. Their silence will become an untenable position. “Same-sex marriage will not be the end of the debate,” Howard said. He warned that Labor wanted to review religious exemptions from anti-discrimination law and that the Greens wanted to remove them. In this context, the concerns expressed about religious protections in future were “legitimate”.

Frankly, Howard’s critique of the government could hardly be more serious — that it hasn’t dealt honestly with the people and that unless it comes clean with the public, it is expecting people to vote without being fully informed.