

# Australian Quakers call for PM to legislate on same-sex marriage, ditch plebiscite

By Tom McIlroy

Officially known as the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers have about 2000 members and regular worshippers in Australia and have recognised same-sex couples since 1994, including in formal commitment ceremonies.

The church is one of the few Christian organisations to advocate for same-sex marriage, along with some individual Jewish, Uniting and Baptist congregations and celebrants.

Presiding clerk Jo Jordan said Quaker leaders wrote to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull last month, asking the government to ditch a plebiscite, which would be expensive and non-binding.

The letter said Parliament had previously changed the Marriage Act, while recent social debates and the federal election campaign showed "extreme public statements are made on all sides" with little respect for those with differing views.

"We are concerned the amount of money that is going to be spent on the plebiscite could be put to better use and we thought it won't necessarily mean Parliament is going to vote in accordance with the result," Ms Jordan said.

"We have been supportive of same-sex relationships and commitments and hope that the time has come to recognise loving relationships as marriage."



Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) presiding clerk Jo Jordan says a plebiscite on same-sex marriage would be expensive and the result non-binding on MPs.

Photo: James Elsby

The release of the letter comes as the plebiscite vote looks increasingly unlikely, as members of the Nick Xenophon Team have joined the Greens in pledging to vote against enabling legislation.

The Presbyterian Church has reportedly held discussions with the Attorney-General's Department in preparation to stop co-operation with the state on marriage if equality is achieved.

"I think all churches have to make their own statements and we should respect other churches and their decisions about this matter," Ms Jordan said.

"We're not expecting priests are asked to conduct marriages but we think society needs to recognise relationships as equally valid as marriages, which happens already in society at large."

Groups opposed to reform are expected to campaign under a banner of Australians for Marriage, linking Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, orthodox and other groups.

Labor is yet to decide if it will kill off the plebiscite but opposition figures have ramped up their attacks on the process in recent days.

Marriage equality advocate Rodney Croome welcomed the Quakers' opposition to a plebiscite.

"One of the concerns shared by many of the people of faith I speak to is that a plebiscite will divide their congregations into pro-gay and anti-gay camps, undermining years of work to foster constructive dialogue on issues of sexuality," he said.

"There is also concern that a plebiscite will see church funds that should be spent on charity and welfare work go into campaigning against marriage equality instead."

**Published in The Age, September 4, 2016**

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/australian-quakers-call-for-pm-to-legislate-for-samesex-marriage-and-ditch-plebiscite-20160829-gr3bxl.html>