Tensions over same-sex bill content

**EXCLUSIVE**

**JOE KELLY**

A parliamentary showdown is looming over same-sex marriage, with supporters of change demanding conservative MPs immediately release a rival bill aimed at protecting religious freedoms if a Yes vote is returned.

Tensions are increasing within Coalition ranks, with conservatives being warned against undermining the outcome of the postal survey. West Australian Liberal MP Ian Goodenough yesterday confirmed there were “probably about a dozen” MPs working on a rival same-sex marriage bill that would better protect faith-based schools and charities, as opposed to that proposed by his West Australian Liberal colleague Dean Smith.

Mr Goodenough said religious protections in Senator Smith’s bill were too narrowly focused around wedding ceremonies.

However, North Sydney Liberal MP and gay marriage advocate Trent Zimmerman said it was “curious” those opposing change now expected “the right to determine” any final legislation.

“The Australian people — if they vote Yes — will expect the parliament to get on with implementing their will as quickly as possible,” Mr Zimmerman said.

Senator Smith — whose private members’ bill has the backing of Labor as well as Liberal MPs including Mr Zimmerman, Warren Entsch, Trevor Evans and Tim Wilson — said the debate about religious freedoms should be treated separately to honouring any Yes vote.

He also suggested conservative MPs working on the rival bill were guilty of inconsistency, noting the No campaign had called for legislation to be released during the postal survey to inform voters.

“(I have) encouraged proponents of other bills to make their bills available for public scrutiny, especially given this was a key
focus of the No’s campaign during the postal line,” he said. “It makes perfect sense that a bill authored by myself and supported by four other Liberals should be the foundation to give effect to same-sex marriage if that was the outcome of the postal survey.”

Australian Conservatives Senator Cory Bernardi has called for a delay in legislating same-sex marriage in the event of a Yes vote, arguing it is more important to resolve the citizenship crisis. Further doubts have emerged about the validity of more MPs under section 44 of the Constitution.

Meanwhile, Christian indigenous Australians have warned the government they have been overlooked in the marriage debate. Their case has been taken up by the Christian legal think tank Freedom for Faith, which is examining how their communities could be affected if same-sex marriage were legalised without broader protections for religious freedom.

Ngardarb Riches, an elder in the Arriol clan of the Bardi-Jawi people of One Arm Point in Western Australia, told *The Australian* that protections should be included in any same-sex marriage legislation to help preserve indigenous kinship structures.

“We want to see our kinship structure strong; we want to see the family continue to the next generation,” she said.

“If whitefellas in Canberra change the marriage laws that will impact us, and it is going to further confuse our people ... We don’t want to again change the definition of the marriage, the place of the mother and the father.

“There’s got to be respect from both ways. This is part of our culture, it’s been part of our lives, it’s how we’ve kept going, so we can’t just change it.”

Maureen Atkinson, who was raised in a traditional Barngarla family near Port Augusta and taken from her family at age nine and placed in the Umeewarra Mission, also urged the parliament to “listen to our old people”. “Don’t just go ahead and do this. Talk to the old people, the traditional people,” she said. “I don’t hold too much faith in the government.”

Researchers from the US Studies Centre at Sydney University last night revealed that the findings of public opinion surveys in the US and Australia on same-sex marriage showed that support was much stronger in Australia.

It found 60 per cent of Australians supported same-sex marriage, 32 per cent were opposed and 8 per cent were undecided. This compared to the US where 48 per cent supported same-sex marriage, with 40 per cent opposed and 12 per cent undecided.