

## Bob Brown supports marriage plebiscite as a last resort

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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Former Greens leader Bob Brown has said the door should be kept open for a plebiscite if that is the only way of achieving same-sex marriage in the foreseeable future.

Brown's stand comes as the numbers harden against the passage of the machinery for a plebiscite. The Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) has announced it would oppose it, and Victorian crossbencher Derryn Hinch has confirmed his opposition. The Greens have already said they will vote against the legislation. Labor has flagged opposition although it has yet to formalise a decision.

Brown, in [an interview for The Conversation's Politics Podcast](#), said that while a plebiscite was the wrong way to go, without it "I think that down the line there's three more years of waiting".

"We're told that the LGBTI community's going to suffer horrendous insults if we go to a plebiscite. Day-in day-out that is the case. You know, I'm gay, so I understand what people put up with and certainly in past times it's been no fun at times.

"However, I worry about allowing this to continue for year after year," he said.

There was also "a curious thing going on here, because I think the majority of people do want to have a say. Mind you, they're baulking at hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on a job that parliament should do, at a time when we're told we need budget repair.

"So there's so many arguments against a plebiscite, for parliament getting on and doing the job. Malcolm Turnbull – where are you? This is your own inclination. You should insist that there be a vote in the parliament and a free vote of your members and you should put your leadership on the line about it and get this over and done with. And the nation will be grateful to you if you do it," he said.

"But if that's not to be the case, we have to think again about leaving it ... as the conservatives,

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the George Christensens of the world and the Christian lobby etc, want it: 'Oh, let's put it off in the hope that it'll never happen'.

"That leaves Australia at the back of the pack and it leaves a percentage of Australians denied their rights."

He said he knew the Greens had determined that they would not support a plebiscite being set up. "But in politics if the worst comes to the worst, you have to sometimes review how you're going and we'll see."

In a statement the NXT said it supported marriage equality and were ready to vote for it.

It gave two reasons for opposing a plebiscite. First, "this is a matter that the parliament can and should decide on as a free vote of all". "In our representative democracy we are paid to make decisions on behalf of Australians who have voted into office. This is a decision the parliament should make now."

Second, the plebiscite – the result of which the parliament could disregard – could cost A\$160 million or more: money that could be better spent elsewhere.

Crossbench Liberal Democrat senator David Leyonhjelm urged the Greens to rethink their stand, saying they should be concerned that conservatives "are cheering them on". "Freedom to marry is likely to be put back years unless a plebiscite occurs," said Leyonhjelm, who introduced a freedom-to-marry bill to the Senate in 2014.

"I would rather the parliament just passed the legislation without a plebiscite, but it is apparent that under current circumstances it is now the quickest path to same-sex marriage," he said.

*Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations*

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*beyond the academic appointment above.*

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