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MARRIAGE  
EQUALITY.ORG

## Should the Coalition have a conscience vote on Marriage Equality?

### What is a free vote?

A free vote is where all Coalition MPs and Senators can vote according to their conscience and are not bound by party policy. It is sometimes called a conscience vote. A “free vote” involves the freedom for all party members to vote, including the bench.

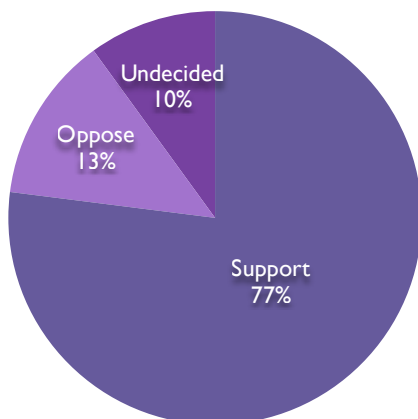
### It's about principle

A free vote is consistent with the Coalition's fundamental principle of individual freedom. This is why, of the 31 free votes since 1950, the Coalition has granted a free vote 30 times. Labor has granted 25.

It is questionable that the Coalition does not allow a free vote on Marriage Equality when Labor, the party of collective action, does.

### Is there support for a conscience vote?

Yes! A recent survey carried out by Crosby/Textor found **77% of Australians support a free vote**. Crosby/Textor also found a free vote is supported by **78%** of Coalition voters and **71%** of swing voters.



Also, senior Coalition figures back a free vote, including some who opposed marriage equality. For example Barnaby Joyce, Russell Broadbent and Mike Baird.

A Coalition free vote would give opponents of marriage equality an opportunity to stand up for their conviction. At the moment they are cannot freely show their opposition to the reform.

### Supporters of a Coalition conscience vote

- Joe Hockey, Treasurer
- George Brandis, Attorney-General
- Christopher Pyne, Minister for Education
- Greg Hunt, Minister for the Environment
- Malcolm Turnbull, Minister for Communications
- Colin Barnett, WA Premier
- Will Hodgman
- Mike Baird, NSW Premier
- Simon Birmingham, TAS Premier
- Barnaby Joyce, Minister for Agriculture
- Russell Broadbent
- Amanda Vandstone, Former Howard Government Minister

### What is the Coalition's policy?

The Coalition went to the last Federal election with a policy of allowing the party room to decide on a free vote. By no means was a free vote ruled out. Prior to the 2013 election, Coalition leader, Tony Abbott said: “Our position, my position, going into the next election, is that what our policy is ... will be a matter for the post-election party room.” According to senior Liberal frontbencher, Christopher Pyne: “In the next parliament we haven't got a clear policy on a conscience vote. The party room will get to decide that.”

### Are marriage laws usually decided on a Coalition free vote?

Yes. Before 2004, all legislation related to marriage was subject to a Coalition conscience vote. This included the MAtrimonial Causes Act 1959, the Marriage Act 1960, the Family Law Act 1974 and the Family Law Amendment Act 1983.

### What about gay law reform?

At a state level the Coalition has traditionally had a free vote on gay law reform, from the decriminalisation of homosexuality to parenting rights for same-sex couples.

Federally, the Coalition had a free vote on a motion in favor of the decriminalisation of homosexuality (October 1973) and the Human Rights (Sexual Privacy) Act overriding Tasmania's anti-gay laws in 1994.

### Aren't Coalition free votes limited to life and death issues?

Clearly, Coalition free votes are not limited to life and death issues. They are common in regard to marriage and to gay law reform. Indeed, the Coalition has allowed free votes on everything from compulsory voting to the construction of new parliament house.

### How can I show my support for a free vote?

Australian Marriage Equality has established a website to assist you in emailing the federal Coalition members in your state, asking them to support a conscience vote. Visit: [www.australianmarriageequality.org/federal-coalition-mp-contact-form](http://www.australianmarriageequality.org/federal-coalition-mp-contact-form)