

Marriage only for a man and a woman: Julia Gillard

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JULIA Gillard has restated her absolute rejection of gay marriage and hotly disputed opposition claims the Australian Greens have hijacked Labor's political agenda.

But her comments come amid division within Labor's powerful Right faction, with Australian Workers Union national secretary Paul Howes yesterday backing gay marriage, putting himself at odds with other key right-wing powerbrokers.

On Wednesday, the Prime Minister said she could overturn an earlier Labor decision, to back a bill put forward by Greens leader Bob Brown that would remove the ability of ministers to overturn territories' laws.

Her comments followed anger from the Labor Right after Greens MPs in the ACT said that if the Brown bill were passed they would renew a push to legalise same-sex marriage.

Tony Abbott yesterday cited the gay marriage push as evidence that the Greens were running her government. But Ms Gillard last night stood by her view that "marriage is between a man and a woman".

Noting that Senator Brown's bill would retain the right of the federal parliament - as distinct from ministers - to overrule territory legislators, she said the federal Marriage Act would overrule gay marriage being given the same status as heterosexual marriage.

"This is a proposition about empowerment of territories that has been around for a long period of time," she said of the Brown bill. "There's nothing that anybody can do in a territory or state parliament that changes the federal Marriage Act."

Despite her comments, the Rudd government and the Howard government used the ministerial veto power to quash past ACT attempts to legislate to allow gay marriage.

Ms Gillard's comments came after Mr Howes told The Australian: "I don't think the state has any right to discriminate against people on the basis of their gender or their sexual orientation."

He also said he had no view on whether the commonwealth should be able to overrule territories. His comments put him at odds with other right-wing unions, including the Shop Distributors and Allied Employees

Association national leader Joe de Bruyn, who told The Australian on Wednesday he opposed the Brown bill and believed it was an attempt to move towards legalised euthanasia.

In parliament, Mr Abbott said the issue showed Senator Brown was the de facto prime minister. "Julia Gillard might be in The Lodge but Bob Brown is running the government," he said. "Whether it's climate change or gay marriage, the Greens are in charge."

As the opposition also continued its attack on Ms Gillard's proposed carbon tax, she hit back, accusing the Coalition of misrepresenting her plans. "On this fear campaign we say to Australians, don't fall for it," she said. "They (the Coalition) are asking you to cower in the face of the future."

As the volume of opposition interjections increased, Ms Gillard grew angry, accusing the Coalition of "race-baiting" in its recent criticism of asylum-seeker policy.

Last night, she stood by her comment, saying Mr Abbott had failed to reject inappropriate comments by frontbenchers Scott Morrison and Cory Bernardi.

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