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Geelong MPs Richard Marles and Sarah Henderson are at loggerheads over marriage equality.

Geelong MPs Sarah Henderson, Richard Marles row over marriage equality plebiscite

ALEX SINNOTT, Geelong Advertiser

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GEELONG'S federal representatives are at loggerheads over a same-sex marriage plebiscite, with any vote likely to be delayed until next year.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull pledged to hold the national vote this calendar year but opposition from most Senate crossbenchers made the prospect increasingly unlikely.

Corangamite MP Sarah Henderson said the Turnbull Government was committed to holding a plebiscite "as soon as practical."

"This approach was previously supported by Labor," the Liberal MP said.

“The government appreciates that many Australians have strong personal views about same-sex marriage. That’s why it was decided that this issue should be resolved through a national vote which gives every Australian the opportunity to have his or her say.

“I am concerned that Labor’s attempts to derail our plebiscite will put this issue on the backburner. If parliamentarians are genuine about their desire for same-sex marriage, they will support the plebiscite in the Parliament.”

Corio MP Richard Marles said the plebiscite highlighted Mr Turnbull’s weak leadership skills given the concept was first proposed by former PM Tony Abbott.

“The plebiscite is unnecessary, expensive and divisive,” the Labor MP said. “There’s a better, faster way to make much marriage equality a reality.

“We can make marriage equality a reality this week. The Parliament should do its job and deal with a marriage equality bill, with all parties afforded a free vote.

“There are few things that show how weak Mr Turnbull is than his backflip on marriage equality. He’s wasting at least \$160m on a plebiscite that won’t even bind MPs to its result.”

The last plebiscite to be held in Australia was staged by the Fraser Government in 1977 on the matter of the national anthem. The Howard Government altered the Marriage Act in 2004 to define marriage as the “legal union of a man and a woman,” a move supported at the time by the Latham opposition.