

Email from **Rt Hon Sir Alan Beith MP**

18 January 2013

Thank you for contacting me in regard to the Government's proposals for same sex marriages.

Although the Bill on same-sex marriages has not yet been published the Government has announced a surprising and significant change in the way it proposes to legislate. The original proposal related purely to civil marriages not to religious marriages. Because there are some religious denominations, such as the Society of Friends and the Unitarians, which seek to offer the opportunity for same-sex marriage in their meeting houses and churches, the Government is now proposing an "opt in" system which it believe will be at least as effective in protecting the rights of denominations opposed to equal marriage as its previous proposals. This change raises new questions about the reliability of the legal protections for churches if legislation for equal marriage goes ahead, and I will be pursuing these points when the legislation is brought forward.

I have some wider concerns about the proposals and it is worth noting that although all three parties are supporting the idea, there are also differing opinions in each of them. None of the parties are intending to impose a whip on the Second Reading of the Bill, and I have made clear throughout that I will vote according to my judgement of the merits of the issue.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Sir Alan Beith MP