

21 posed as age of consent

By JONATHAN BRAUDE

THE Government will propose that the age of consent for homosexual acts between males be set at 21, five years above the age at which females may legally consent to heterosexual intercourse.

The proposal is contained in the controversial Crime (Amendment) Bill to decriminalise homosexuality that is to be approved by the Executive Council on Tuesday.

The proposal is based on British law and is expected to be one of the most fought-over aspects of the Bill.

Officials believe Executive Councillors may hold up the Bill because of the apparent discrimination between the sexes, but they are not expected to make any amendments without first consulting the Legislative Council.

Despite a split between Legislative and Executive Councillors over decriminalising Victorian homosexuality laws, the Government is confident Exco will approve the draft Bill in time for publication in the Government Gazette on Friday.

Last July, the Legislative Council voted 31 to 13 in fa-

vour of decriminalising homosexual acts following almost 10 years of public debate.

For the estimated 250,000 homosexuals in the territory, the legislation would remove fear of discovery and prosecution, making it easier for the homosexual community to participate in AIDS education.

While the Executive Council may approve the Bill, there could be attempts to water down some provisions in the Legislative Council.

Besides the age of consent, councillors could balk at the rules governing homosexual rape. The Bill proposes making crimes committed against underage males the equivalent of crimes against females under 16, despite the higher age of consent.

After an early first reading, probably on April 17, the Bill will most likely be sent for discussion in a Legco *ad hoc* committee before being returned to the chamber for debate.

However, the Government is confident some form of decriminalising legislation will be passed by the summer.