



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Roundtable discussion: Reforming the Constitution

Chair: Mr Mark Dreyfus QC, MP

Constitutional Reform: “Public engagement and participation key to future reform”

Federal-State relations, a constitutional preamble and issues of citizenship were on the agenda today at a roundtable on constitutional reform held by the federal parliament’s Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee at Parliament House, Canberra.

The Roundtable on constitutional reform heard from some of Australia’s leading constitutional law experts on possible options for the reform of Australia’s Constitution.

The Committee Chair, Mr Mark Dreyfus QC, MP, said: “Our purpose today was not to arrive at the definitive ‘last word’ but rather to explore each topic, identifying the key issues and whether reform is necessary and feasible.”

The roundtable discussion topics included: alteration of the Constitution; four year fixed terms and qualifications of members; federal-state relations; recognition of indigenous peoples and a new preamble; and citizenship and human rights.

Speaking on the proceedings, Mr Dreyfus said: “We were able to hear a broad range of views canvassed on the discussion topics. The roundtable was an invaluable opportunity to reinvigorate public discussion on our Constitution and to build on the discussion of the 2020 summit.”

A key point emphasised by participants was the importance of public involvement and dialogue, particularly in regards to the process for amending the Constitution and in the drafting of any preamble.

“It’s clear that any future reforms of the Constitution need not just the approval of the Australian people, but their participation and engagement as well. The participants were able to provide us with some options to encourage broad involvement in this dialogue.

“The input from the participants has provided the Committee, and the wider public, with a better insight into some of the options and challenges for constitutional reform in the future. The Committee will be releasing a report into the proceedings later in the year,” added Mr Dreyfus.

As well as the Committee Members, participants included Professor Larissa Behrendt, Mr Peter Black, Professor Tony Blackshield, Professor Hilary Charlesworth, Professor Greg Craven, Professor David Flint AM, Mr Peter Hanks QC, Professor The Honourable Michael Lavarch, Professor Lowitja O’Donoghue, Professor Kim Rubenstein, Professor Cheryl Saunders, Ms Khatija Thomas, Ms Anne Twomey, Professor George Williams, and Professor Leslie Zines.

For interview:

Please contact the Committee Chair, Mr Mark Dreyfus QC, MP on (02) 6277 4305 (Canberra) or in his electorate on (03) 9769 1955.

Or Mr Dreyfus' media adviser, Tim Lisle-Williams on 0431 178 280

For background information, including the program for the day and a list of participants with biographies, please contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 2358 or visit the roundtable website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca/reformcon.htm>