



## New report on Australia's Constitution

A new report, *Reforming our Constitution: a roundtable discussion* was released last night (23 June) by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

It is nine years since the last referendum was held to amend the Australian Constitution, and it is over 30 years since there was a successful referendum to amend Australia's Constitution. The present decade may be the first since Federation during which there is no referendum held.

The lack of reform to the Constitution has had many unintended consequences, including a proliferation in the number of Federal-State intergovernmental agreements with no formal oversight mechanisms for these agreements. The report recommends that all intergovernmental agreements are referred to a parliamentary committee for scrutiny.

The report also advocates greater public debate on constitutional reform, and in particular on issues such as whether the Constitution should be revised to:

- acknowledge where we as Australians have come from;
- set out rights and protections as well as practical national governance structures; and
- articulate aspirations for a nation.

Committee Chair Mark Dreyfus QC said, "The stepping stone to nationhood that the Australian Constitution represented in 1901 is now in some aspects a boulder placed in the way of cooperative federalism, Indigenous reconciliation, and public engagement in our governance".

He added, "While the Constitution has served us well, there are now several areas where reform is long overdue if the Constitution is to reflect contemporary Australia and be a document to guide our nation for the future".

To progress public debate on constitutional reform the Committee conducted a roundtable on 1 May 2008. The report summarises those discussions and covers key issues such as:

- mechanisms to change the Australian Constitution
- introducing fixed four year election terms
- the disqualification provisions for members of parliament
- Federal-State relations, cooperative federalism and the escalation of intergovernmental agreements
- constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians and a new preamble for all Australians, and
- citizenship in the Constitution and a Bill of Rights.

**A media conference is scheduled for 12:45 pm on Tuesday 24 June in Committee Room 2R2, Parliament House. It will be webcast live on:**

<http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

**For interview.** contact the Committee Chair, Mark Dreyfus QC, MP on (02) 6277 4305 (Canberra) or Mr Dreyfus' media adviser, Tim Lisle-Williams.

**For background information** on the roundtable and copies of the report visit <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca/reports.htm> or contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 2358.