



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

MEDIA ALERT

Issued: 20 October 2009

Chair: Mr Mark Dreyfus QC, MP

Constitutional Change: Not as Simple as Yes or No

Only 76% of Australians of voting age recognise that Australia has a constitution, according to research by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). The Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee will hear ALGA's views on the challenge of changing the constitution at a public hearing this Thursday in Canberra. One of the key difficulties is ensuring that voters understand the proposed change to the constitution.

The Chair of the House of Representatives Committee Mark Dreyfus QC said "The constitution was not designed to be changed easily, but any change needs voters to be engaged and informed. Voters are not fully engaged or informed when 'don't know – vote no' can be put forward as a serious argument."

"The current legislative provisions only provide for the preparation and distribution of a Yes/No pamphlet. It is appropriate to ask whether the Yes/No pamphlet is the best way for voters to understand proposals for constitutional change," the Committee Chair added.

Under the current legislation, the federal government can only inform voters about a proposal for constitutional change through the Yes/No pamphlet. The purpose of the inquiry is to determine whether this legislation is sufficient in addressing voter requirements in the lead up to a referendum. The inquiry will consider whether there are other ways to provide the public with the same or greater levels of explanatory information.

As part of this public hearing program, the Committee will hear from ALGA and Peter Brent from the Democratic Audit of Australia.

Details of the public hearing:

Date: Thursday 22 October 2009

Time: 9.30am – 10.30am Australian Local Government Association (Sub 21)
10.30am – 11.00am Peter Brent, Democratic Audit of Australia

Location: Committee Room 1R3, Parliament House, Canberra

Webcast: (Audio only) Live on <http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

Members of the public are welcome to attend this public hearing.

For interview:

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 please visit the inquiry website at www.aph.gov.au/laca or contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 2358.