

Additional Comments

The Labor government supports an Australian republic, but not yet.

So, to avoid embarrassment, the committee has declined to make any recommendations and declined to acknowledge that I was the senator who introduced the Bill.

This is despite the 2001 Corowa Conference calling for a plebiscite, Senator Stott Despoja's 2001 Republic (Consultation of the People) Bill including a plebiscite, the 2004 Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee recommending a plebiscite and the Australia 2020 Summit nominating the republic in its top ideas and calling for a plebiscite.

There was no opposition, even from trenchant monarchists, to Australia having another vote on the question of a republic. The only two questions are when and what form, with some monarchists preferring a referendum to a plebiscite.

There was no evidence presented which indicated that some specified future time will be better than the near future or, at least, during the next period of government if not the next election.

Questions about whether the determination should be by plebiscite or referendum were arcane and unreasonable. The preponderant view is that a plebiscite to determine the question is the right way forward.

However, some cogent reasons for having two or more questions were presented. A number of thoughtful witnesses said that multiple questions would avoid a campaign aimed to (falsely) frighten people that a "yes" vote would enable politicians to decide what form the republic should take.

Some submissions and witnesses put forward the need to have two plebiscites to ensure that people stay involved in the decision making and that there is a clear path to a referendum.

I am persuaded that following an initial plebiscite with the threshold question:

1. Should Australia become a republic with an Australian head of state?

That, if the Australian people vote yes to the first plebiscite, a second plebiscite be held. A second plebiscite would be preceded by a widespread information and awareness campaign and would include questions based on those decided by the 2001 People's Convention at Corowa (see Women for an Australian Republic submission, p2). Taking into account several other submissions, I recommend the questions in the second plebiscite be:

1. Should an Australian head of state be called:
 - a. President?
 - b. Governor-General?
2. Should the powers of the head of state be defined?
3. Should the head of state be selected by:
 - a. the Prime Minister?
 - b. a two-thirds majority of the federal parliament?
 - c. an electoral college specially elected by all voters?
 - d. direct election involving all voters?

From the answers to these questions the government can then develop republican models to take to a referendum to change the constitution.

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