

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill 2008

The Australian Constitution establishes a stable, democratic system of government for this nation under the Crown. It provides in Section 128 a mechanism by which the people may, from time to time, amend it to alter our constitutional arrangements. In essence it allows the government of the day with the support of one or both Houses of Parliament to present to the people a proposed law detailing the amendments sought. If a majority of the electors in the Commonwealth and a majority of electors in a majority of the States approve the proposed law then the Constitution is altered. This procedure preserves the initiative of Parliament and our elected members. It also provides for transparency and clarity as all details of any proposed amendment are placed before the electorate prior to it being called upon to express an opinion - one which could have serious ramifications for the government of Australia.

The *Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill 2008* seeks to initiate a process of constitutional amendment of the most fundamental nature in a manner foreign to the Constitution itself. It has the potential to seriously compromise our current arrangements while at the same time providing no guarantee of any new system of government. For this reason the Bill should be rejected. I ask the Committee to consider the following points:

1. In 1999 the Australian electorate, following the procedure laid out in Section 128 of the Constitution, **rejected the proposed republican model** in favour of the current constitutional arrangements. While our democracy permits proposed amendments to be placed before the people at any time it defies common sense that the electorate would be compelled to consider the republican issue every 10 or so years. It betrays contempt for the expressed will of the people.
2. At this time of **grave financial crisis** it is incumbent on the Parliament and our political leaders to focus on issues of vital concern to the livelihood of Australians. The cost of holding a plebiscite and the distraction it will provide for our political leaders is something the country cannot currently afford.
3. Section 128 of the Constitution provides for a clear and detailed proposal to be placed before the people when a constitutional alteration is sought. **This Bill places a nebulous 'republic' before the electorate** which will remain undefined until after the people have voted. Its result, then, while meaningless in terms of expressing the mind of the electorate could be used as a powerful piece of propaganda to undermine our system of government.

4. Any constitutional model chosen by the Australian people should command the respect of the nation quite apart from personal preference. This Bill contains within itself the potential to bring our current system into contempt without providing for a viable alternative. **A successful result for a republic in the plebiscite could quite conceivably be overturned in a subsequent referendum** as provided for under Section 128 where all the details concerning the nature of the republic would be known to the electorate. This flawed process could provide a flawed result which would bring the Constitution itself into disrepute and resolve nothing. It must be avoided at all costs.

For these reasons **I call on the Senate to reject the *Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill 2008***.

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