

The Secretary  
Finance and Public Administration Committee  
The Senate, Parliament House, Canberra

Submission from:

Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill 2008

I object to this Bill on many grounds.

A Plebiscite is not the way to change Australia's Constitution, particularly on an issue as central as the abolition of the Crown.

What sort of "republic" is proposed? It is misleading to ask people to vote on something that lacks detail. The Reserve Powers are of particular concern and where they will lie should be made clear from the outset of any discussion.

While the issue of "head of state" may not be included in this proposed plebiscite, it is prominent in republican propaganda. It is an emotive issue that is misunderstood. The Monarch is not Australia's "head of state".

Despite claims to the contrary, including some official Government publications, the Governor-General is our "head of state", and this has been stated many times, including by the High Court early last century.

Australia is already totally independent, and sharing our Crown with other Realms does not reduce our National Sovereignty. It is false to promote the idea that Australia is in some way still controlled by London. There is no evidence that other countries view Australia as a Colonial dependency of the United Kingdom, and our International Relations and Trade will not be improved by this change. On the contrary, the world is full of emerging Republics, and retaining the Crown is one of the distinguishing features that makes us different and helps us stand out from the crowd.

While I oppose this Plebiscite and any similar Referendum, I am concerned that the issue continues to divide Australians. There is no reason why Australia will ever become a Republic, except that if sufficient people are convinced to support it in the belief it is inevitable, this circular argument alone will achieve its objective, despite lacking any other, meaningful reason. It would be better to bring the issue to a head and resolve it finally. It will also put an end to "republicanism by stealth".

Australia is already a "crowned republic", with the double advantage of all the attributes that are claimed for an ideal Republic, while retaining the legal and constitutional safeguards inherent in the Crown. All Australia's major institutions derive from the British model, including our Westminster style Parliament, Whitehall style Executive, our Common Law and our Judiciary, our Military and Police forces, and for all of them the Crown is their foundation.

A minimalist change must be impractical, and becoming a Republic would mean total "rebranding" with major changes to every Department, Committee and piece of paper. While this would produce a significant Economic boom for Canberra and the Government Sector, it would be an unproductive waste of resources better spent elsewhere.

There are strategic advantages in keeping this link to the Anglo Alliance and within the European Community.

Other changes would follow, including the loss of our National Flag, although no alternative has been proposed. Australia Day will also lose its meaning if we no longer acknowledge the significance of the British start to modern Australia. A Republic will not help the process of Aboriginal Reconciliation. It would also probably mean an end to the British Commonwealth of Nations.

There is enormous bias in the Australian Media in favour of this change, and our Royal Family receive very bad publicity that is unjustified. It is unfair to expect Australians to vote when they are so poorly informed on the issue. We are well-served by a low-cost, distant Monarch, who "reigns but does not rule", and this safeguard against "absolute power" is the best way to prevent totalitarian rule in centuries to come.

A decade ago a similar proposal was clearly defeated. Opinion polls since then indicate that such a change is losing support amongst Australians. Her Majesty the Queen is immensely popular. Gradually, Australians are coming to appreciate the excellent qualities of His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, who has been maligned in the media for years without any justification.

Monarchy, as an institution, has changed over the centuries, and Australia's contemporary society reflects those developments. Monarchy is not part of an obsolete "received wisdom" that needs to be brushed aside in order to embrace enlightened modernity. Instead, with continuing change, the symbolism inherent in Monarchy is the best way to implement further changes to our society, including increased equality, improved social mobility and an end to lingering prejudice based on gender, race or creed. Australia should support proposals to change the Rules of Succession to reflect these democratic principles.