

The Secretary  
Finance and Public Administration Committee,  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

### Plebiscite on an Australian Republic Bill 2008

My response to the invitation to make a submission on this Bill will be brief. The Bill should not proceed any further because the time is not right. I should disclose my interest – I don't believe it will ever be right. However if I were a supporter of an Australian Republic I would recognise that now is not the time and for two reasons.

First: Mr E. G. Whitlam, whose Republican credentials are impeccable, says that now is not the time. I refer to the article by Tony Stephens in the Sydney Morning Herald of 31 October 2008 where he quotes the former Prime Minister as saying:

“I agree that there should be a referendum on the Republic but it should be held after the demise of the Crown. Any referendum before then would not succeed because of the Australian people's affection and respect for Queen Elizabeth.”

If Mr Whitlam says it is not time it is not time.

Second:

- a. In all probability, Australia will still be in recession when the proposed plebiscite is held.

- b. A positive vote will not increase Australia's export income by \$1, or create a single ongoing new job. It will take up a lot of the time of our political and other leaders and absorb substantial public and private resources. The result, at best, would be a non-binding vote that will not change our constitutional arrangements in the slightest.
- c. The time, attention, and resources devoted to a plebiscite would be much better spent running the country and trying to minimise the impact of the present financial crisis on ordinary Australians.
- d. Australians who have lost or are at risk of losing their job or their home will not be interested in this topic.
- e. The Australian public will not thank, or reward, political parties who saddle the country with such a circus at a time like this, especially when there is not even an agreed republican model.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr (Acting) Justice K. R. Handley