

30 January 2009

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission concerning the Australian Republic Plebiscite Bill 2008

I am making this Submission in response to a public invitation and I request that it be brought to the attention of the Committee.

I am a supporter of the constitutional monarchy under our present Constitution, which by its very nature provides the nation with a sense of stability and continuity in a rapidly changing world environment.

I am therefore opposed to the above Bill, which is clearly intended to be the first step in a process to influence public opinion in favour of change to a republican system.

A second step in this process would presumably be a Referendum, aimed at reversing the outcome of the 1999 Referendum, when a clear majority of the public voted in favour of retaining the system of constitutional monarchy as prescribed in the present Australian Constitution.

I would point out that changing our Constitution by removing the Sovereign and replacing her or him by an elected President, would add another, potentially very divisive, electoral process to an already crowded succession of state and federal elections in Australia.

Furthermore, an elected President would always be a potential political threat to the Prime Minister and this situation would adversely affect the nation's long-term political stability.

It is claimed by advocates of a republic that replacing the Sovereign by a President would increase Australia's level of political independence and freedom of action. This, however, cannot be so, as Australia is already a fully independent nation, with absolute freedom of action under International Law.

However it should be noted that Treaties already negotiated with other nations – such as the ANZUS Treaty with the United States of America – impose some obligations and limitations on our freedom of action.

On the other hand, such international limitations could never be imposed as a consequence of the purely symbolic, but friendly, links, which currently exist between

Australia and the three other independent nations, or “crowned realms” under the 1931 Statute of Westminster. These are the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada, all of whom share our language, our legal system and our system of parliamentary democracy.

Although many journalists and some academics support a change to a republic, there do not appear to be signs, in the general public, of unrest or dissatisfaction with our present constitutional arrangements.

I submit that reviving a public debate on changing our Constitution to a republican one would be particularly divisive and unsettling at this time of international and national financial crisis.

A plebiscite – followed by a second Referendum - would also be a great extravagance, particularly as only ten years have passed since the first Referendum was decisively rejected.

I therefore urge members of the Senate Committee, after due consideration of all the factors involved, to oppose this Bill.

I remain yours truly,

W.L. Owen.