



30 January 2009

The Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration
The Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sirs/Mesdames,

Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill 2008

I write to oppose the passing of this Bill. Grounds for my opposition are as follow:-

- The choice of the Plebiscite process, rather than that of a Referendum, is wrong;
- The term "Republic" in the title of the Bill is insufficiently defined;
- The financial impost on the nation at this time is not justified.

Plebiscite versus Referendum

Australia's Founding Fathers and subsequent judicial interpretations of their work have laid down the process by which the Australian people may change the nation's Constitution and their wisdom and farsightedness has been demonstrated on many occasions. They recognised that when constitutional change is contemplated, it is a serious matter which should involve a commonwealth-state-people process, not surprisingly complex, which in both prospect and retrospect, must be seen to have been fair, reasonable, mature, and in outcome unarguable.

We live in a world society much more ready than in earlier years, to give violent responses to events or circumstances not to their liking. Australians see opposition groups using a range of violent methods on their television screens almost daily. Unless they know, without the slightest doubt, that what is being promoted is in accordance with the machinery our Constitution requires, then dissident groups will have and will likely use leverage as a not-unnatural part of which is (at least to them) comprised of violent acts. Australia not only does not need this but would be diminished in world eyes by such occurrences.

Further, to ask of the populace an over-simplified question (e.g. "Do you support Australia becoming a republic?") is to diminish the importance of such a step and to create a mindset in substantial sections of the community - and we know that a significant percentage of Australians are not sufficiently aware of the detail and requirements of our Constitution (and thus must be defined at least in this particular sense as "ignorant") - of variable understanding and unrealistic expectation. To date, there is not unanimity about the meaning of the word "republic"

Finally on this point, if a plebiscite were held and a 'consequential' referendum were to fail, Australians would be justified in losing confidence in the integrity of the system/s by which they are presently content to be governed, a position carrying most serious implications for the nation's future.

The Term "Republic"

Dictionary definitions of the word "republic" (Concise Oxford says "A State in which government is carried on nominally & usu. in fact also by the people or through its elected representatives, commonwealth" while Macquarie in essence reflects Concise Oxford) suggest to me that a republic is what we already have, in substance. Why then ask the people if they want a republic, unless there is, as would be seen by many, a hidden, even to them, subversive, agenda ?

But the Macquarie adds one more element: "A state, especially a democratic state, in which *the head of the government* (my italics and underlining) is an elected or nominated president, not a hereditary monarch." Is this what the proposed Bill is all about ? If not, why is the purpose of the Bill not expressed in language understandable to all, as opposed to using a word, the definition of which varies between individuals and even , as our recent history has shown, between competing advocates.

In what is likely to be seen by much of the populace as a subterfuge, a back-door way of being able to say there is popular support for the idea of an elected president, in this lie the seeds of great disputation and community discomfort, not to mention possibilities of what this letter has earlier mentioned. The proposal lacks transparency, a characteristic which breeds distrust and ill-will between people.

Costs of Seeking the Public's Opinion

It is claimed that \$10.5 million has been estimated as the cost of the proposed plebiscite if held in conjunction with an election. There is no apparent indication of how extensively this covers all the costs, including labour and supporting facilities. Given that the 1984 referendum, the latest held in conjunction with a federal election, cost \$4 million then, one would have to expect that \$10.5 million is a most conservative estimate.

The doubtful nature of this quotation is apparent. But of greater moment is the question of why, in current difficult financial times in Australia as well as the rest of the world, and given the insubstantial nature of aa plebiscite compared to the responsible path of a referendum, any politician can justify such expenditure when there is not the need. Such a situation cannot help but arouse suspicion, an effect certainly not needed in Australia at this time.

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The following conclusions summarise this writer's position:

1. The proposal to conduct a plebiscite on this matter is flawed and inconsistent with Australia's fine and highly-regarded world-wide, Constitution;
2. The proposal contains strong overtones of behaviour firstly attempting to obscure the real issue or issues and thus to mislead the Australian people, and secondly risking such community division as to create circumstances for violent dissent between groups of people, not all of whom might even understand what the arguments are about;
3. The proposal plans to spend money unnecessarily, at a time of national financial stringency, on an activity which in itself is contrary to the Australian Constitution.

I am prepared to accept that in time some change may need to be made in the matter of Australia's Head of State and how that position may be filled. I have some views on how that could happen. But I am unreservedly opposed to inappropriate ways to seek to achieve this, ways in whose wake could easily come "unintended (Constitutional) consequences" (as the proposer might later say) with damage not easily remedied.

The proposed plebiscite should not, in Australia's interests must not, be allowed to proceed.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'G. J. ...', is written over a faint rectangular stamp or box.