

24 January 2009



The Secretary  
Finance and Public Administration Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra 2600

Re: plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill

Dear Secretary

I wish to make a submission on the proposed bill for a plebiscite for an Australian Republic. I am strongly against the idea of a plebiscite for the following reasons.

1/ We are not told what form the proposed republic will take. If a subsequent referendum were held and defeated (which is very probable) we would be left with a constitution that had in effect a vote of no confidence but with no alternative.

There is also the danger that our politicians will feel that they have a mandate to change the constitution to establish a republic by parliamentary vote, which is possible under the constitution. If this should be seen as an aim by some of our politicians, then I wish to inform them that many Australians will view this as an unacceptable abuse of the power vested by the constitution on our parliaments.

2/ There is in Australia in my opinion some considerable ethnic hatred directed at the English. This is usually looked over or denied because the English are seen as a "majority culture". The fact that some people of English descent or English birth participate in this ethnic hatred themselves does not make it any less unacceptable. It is shameful for Australia the way in which this ethnic hatred is both tolerated and denied. It is not that unusual for constitutional monarchists to be told to go back to England, even if they are born in Australia and are of Australian descent. The republican movement has a large component of hatred within it, even though their leaders will vehemently deny or try to cover it up.

My point in mentioning this is that before any further steps towards a republic should be discussed (whether one is in favour of a republic or not) this hatred needs to be both recognised and confronted. It is a very ugly aspect of Australian life.

3/ I object to the very considerable costs involved so far in the consideration of republicanism. Many parts of the media highlight the costs of royal visits. In actual fact the costs of republicanism to the Australian taxpayer over the past thirteen years makes the cost of royal visits seem miniscule. A plebiscite has no place in the constitution. When plebiscites have been used in other parts of the world in the past they have frequently been used to enhance the power of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. I do not wish to see more taxpayer's money wasted on republicanism, especially on this very suspect exercise.

Finally I take issue with Senator Brown's assertion that Australians have been yearning to become a republic since federation, or words to that effect. This is not my experience. My Australian grandmother (born 1894) did not yearn for a republic. My Australian mother (born 1934) certainly did not yearn for a republic. My father who migrated from the United Kingdom in 1950 would not have migrated to Australia if it had been a republic. Australians in five colonies approved in referendums a federal constitution with the crown at its centre. In 1999 Australians rejected a proposal to turn Australia into a republic, despite overwhelming media support for the idea. From my point of view Senator Brown's assertion is completely wrong, verging on fantasy.

If this proposed plebiscite does take place I will not be talking with my fellow citizens about the republic but the reasons for this shameful exercise and waste of money. In short the plebiscite itself will become the issue, not a proposed republic. If this plebiscite is covered under the electoral act and voting is made compulsory then acts of civil disobedience should not be ruled out. I can only see this proposal as being contemptuous of Australian democracy.

Respectfully Yours

Alvan Rigby