

05/02/2009

Committee Secretary
Finance and Public Administration Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into the Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill 2008

I see no fundamental problem with the question "Do you support Australia becoming a republic?" to be submitted to voters at the next general election for the House of Representatives [*Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Act 2008*]. However, I would like to raise four issues:

- 1) The *Explanatory Memorandum for the Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Act 2008* puts an estimated cost on the referendum to be held during the next Federal election at approximately \$10.5 million. This is a substantial amount of money, especially in a time of economic recession. Therefore possibly it would be more prudent to first ensure that Australia is in a more healthy economic state before spending taxpayers' money on an issue that can wait. [The next federal election must be held on or before April 11, 2011, at which time we shall almost certainly still be in budget deficit].
- 2) Also, before deciding to hold such a referendum the Government should appoint experts to closely examine existing surveys on the possibility of becoming a republic, such as the UMR Research Pty Ltd '*Australia Wants a Republic: Quantitative and Qualitative Findings, November 2008*' to best decide on the need and nature of such a referendum.
- 3) The results of this referendum would obviously have very important implications for the republican debate. It is therefore of paramount importance that the question posed seeks an educated response rather than a knee-jerk reaction. Prior to the referendum there should an educational campaign explaining what exactly a change to a republic would mean for Australia and the Australian public, exactly how much it will cost taxpayers, and the arguments for and against such a change.
- 4) Is the question over-simplified? Perhaps following the general question "Do you support Australia becoming a republic?" there could be a further option as to what republican model the Australian public would prefer [the *Australian Republican Movement* puts forward six models]. The result of the second questions would be a useful tool in the ongoing deliberations on this matter and would save time and money on consultations in the future.

Sincerely,

Miss Siobhan Reeves