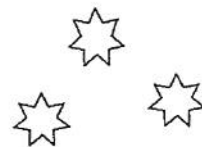


The Real Republic Limited



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Submission on behalf of

The Real Republic Limited ACN 085 283 656

to the Inquiry into the Plebiscite for an

Australian Republic Bill 2008

by the

Finance and Public Administration Committee

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Background

Messrs Muir, Mack and Cleary were elected to the Constitutional Convention in 1998 along with Clem Jones, now deceased. Following the convention in 1998, The Real Republic Limited was formed to support the No case during the 1999 referendum. Messrs Clem Jones and Ted Mack sat on the No Case Committee formed by the Commonwealth.

The Real Republic Limited will continue to campaign for a republican model which provides for direct election of the Head of State.

Introduction

It is contemplated by the Bill that a national plebiscite be held asking the question:

"Do you support Australia becoming a Republic?"

Submission

(a) Severance question

This question could be described as the severance question, ie whether Australia should sever links with the Monarchy.

It will be better if the question was framed as follows:

"Do you support ending constitutional links with the British Monarchy?"

This question more accurately deals with the threshold issue and poses a more self-contained question. The question put in the Bill has the undesirable consequence of leading to further questions of what kind of Republic and is really an open-ended question.

The putting of the severance question is a desirable first step in a process. In essence, the severance question is important as once that question is resolved in a non-binding plebiscite, the focus then becomes what kind of republic.

In order for any republic process to succeed, it is critical that the people have ownership of the process and the content of the process.

At the end of the day, the Australian people have the right to choose the kind of republic.

There is significant anecdotal and empirical evidence that the Australian people favour a model which provides for direct election of the Head of State.¹

The importance of the severance question is that once resolved, monarchists would then be able to participate in the choice of model. Interestingly, raw data indicates that among monarchist supporters in every political party in Australia, the great majority would prefer a direct election if there must be a republic.²

It follows that resolution of the severance question would be a great unifier in any move for change.

(b) Whole of the process

The balance of the process is as important as the commencement of the process, if not more so. There is a profound distrust of excessive powers in the hands of any individual or government in Australia³. Accordingly, the whole of the process needs to be inclusive and transparent and the people need to be involved in choosing the model for a republic.

It is important that at the commencement of the process, the whole of the process be announced. If this is not done, the evitable questions will be asked about what kind of republic and the involvement of the Australian people in the process. Announcement of the whole of the process will allay fears and will avoid unnecessary distraction or dilution of opinion on the severance question. It is likely that the question will be statistically more accurate in these circumstances.

The holding of a further constitutional convention for the formulation of various models for the republic would be desirable, particularly if the delegates were elected to that convention.

One of the mistakes of the 1999 referendum was that the Australian people were not given any choice about the model for a republic. The model itself was flawed and did not provide for the aspiration of the Australian people for a directly elected Head of State.

Ultimately, workable models may be able to be presented by way of a multi-choice referendum under section 128 of the Constitution following some minor amendment to the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* to allow for preferential voting.

(c) Timing

It is agreed that the severance question should be held in conjunction with the next House of Representatives election as holding the national plebiscite at that time will have the advantage of lessening cost. It is important that there is no further delay in asking the severance question as there needs to be sufficient time between the first step and further steps in the process which require a great deal more consideration and engagement by the people. It would not be right to wait for Queen Elizabeth II to die or abdicate in favour of Charles before moving to become a Republic.

¹ UMR Research Pty Ltd Report November 2008.

² John Pyke in his review of the Australian Referendum Survey conducted in 1999 by Gow, Bean and McAllister.

³ Andrew Murray in Introduction to "Trusting the People" 2001.

Becoming a republic is the business of our country, not the business of family succession in another country.

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