

# **THE CHANGE TO A REPUBLIC IN AUSTRALIA**

## **THE CASE FOR A CHANGE**

A constitutional monarchy derives its legitimacy from its roots in the people and, in some cases, the predominant religion. Whereas at the time of federation Australia could define itself as a Christian country with a predominantly Anglo-Saxon people, that is no longer the case, and it is changing ever more so from that situation. The ethnic and the religious mix are moving away from that model.

The English crown has less and less connection with the Australian people. The last referendum indicated that had the republican movement been able to agree on a model the referendum for a republic would have been won.

Polls repeatedly indicate a majority in favour of a republic and the mood for change is growing.

The English monarchy has indicated that it expects Australia to adopt a republican form of government.

## **PROBLEMS WITH THE PROPOSED MODEL**

Australians indicated quite clearly at the last referendum that they were not prepared to support an arrangement where the head of state was appointed by the government.

This position reflected a deep-seated reluctance to allow the leadership of the country to be concentrated effectively in one person and one party. Some separation of powers is desirable.

On the other hand, it was agreed that if the Head of State was to be elected in a normal fashion it would establish two separate centres of power that would compete. That is not a desirable situation.

The key is to avoid an election with the attendant trappings of campaigns, policies to be enunciated, etc.

There are also major constitutional problems if there is to be a move to a true republican model.

## **A NEW MODEL**

Under current arrangements the Prime Minister recommends to the Sovereign a candidate for appointment as Governor-General. Because the crown has the power to refuse, although that is very unlikely as we have seen, the reserve power does ensure that the selection is normally carefully considered. It does tend to reflect the political colour of the party in power however, which is one of the reasons that the public are cautious about letting Parliament (which means in effect the ruling party) decide on the head of State.

The trick is to avoid the political process as far as possible and to erect a model that requires as little change as possible.

In a republic the people are sovereign. At the moment the Crown is sovereign. So instead of the PM recommending his or her choice of head of state to the Crown, he must do it to the people.

That can be done quite simply by requiring the Electoral Office to mail to all registered voters a document setting out the PM's recommendation and a CV of the candidate, together with a YES-NO ballot paper. Voters would have a month to return the ballot paper to the Commission.

## **THE ADVANTAGES**

The politics are avoided and a quick and cheap process takes place.

The head of state remains very much in the same situation as now with little need to change the Constitution apart from perhaps changing the name of the G-G.

The head of state is answerable to the people, derives authority from the people, and is head of the armed forces.

There are not two centres of political power but there is an entity that provides a check on the power of the PM and parliament if necessary.

Removal of the Head of State would be done by the same process following a two-thirds vote of both houses.