

The Standing Committee on Finance & Public Administration

The Senate

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

9th January 2009.

Re: 'Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Act 2008'.

As stated above, my name is Brant Rippon. I am 21 years of age; currently reside in Brisbane, and am about to commence my final year of study at Griffith University, where I am studying B. Arts Maj. Criminal Justice; Maj. Politics, Economy and Society. I am making a submission *against* the proposed act forwarded by Sen. Brown, and I will outline my reasons why as follows;

- *Current model is effective:* As I have stated above, I am a student of politics. Throughout my studies, I have found that Australia's system of governance is unparalleled in its efficiency and protection of its people. Although Australia is one of the youngest nations on earth, it is one of the oldest democracies. The reason why I believe this to be the case is due to the number of checks and balances in place – our separation of powers through the three tiers of government and so-on, that does not allow one person to hold absolute power. We have a constitutional system where a hereditary and impartial monarch chooses a non-political, impartial Australian as Governor-General and Head of State on the advice of the Prime Minister. I believe this system is the most effective and safe way that Australia is and should continue to be governed, and has led to over a century of peace and prosperity – No political assassinations, No civil unrest, No tyranny or dictatorships. This is undoubtedly why Australia has finished at the top of a list of the 'world's best democracies' compiled by the United Nations – report released on 18th December 2008.

Arguments against Australia remaining a constitutional monarchy are unfounded in my belief. I have heard a number of republicans' state that we should have an Australian as Head of State – but we already do, the Governor-General. Others refer to the Queen as the Queen of England, and that we are somehow still subjugated by the 'old-country' – but this is not the case. She is referred to as the Queen of Australia, and under the 'Australia Act 1986', all legal ties with Britain were severed. We are a sovereign nation, with HM Queen Elizabeth II Queen of Australia as *our* sovereign. There are countless other fictional tales and misinformation about our current system. I have personally lost count of how many people believe that Queen Elizabeth costs the Australian tax-payer millions of dollars a year, when in fact she costs the Australian tax-payer nothing. The problem lies not in

Australia remaining a constitutional monarchy, but in education. We should not be having a plebiscite on a republic, which Sen. Brown claims will cost \$10.5 million on top of the cost of the General Election – rather, this money would be better spent on educational materials given to Australian schools, and the implementation of political studies as a compulsory subject taught in Australian secondary schools. There is a shocking lack of knowledge about how our system of governance works amongst the Australian populous, particularly the youth. Misinformation spread by republican media sources and the general naivety of the Australian populous of our political workings has created an anti-monarchical attitude in the community, not least a misunderstanding of the role of the monarch and Governor-General in our political system. Current Minister for Health, The Hon. Nicola Roxon made a comment some time ago that all republicans have to do is wait for monarchists to ‘die out’ to create an Australian republic, under the presumption that anyone whom supported our current constitutional arrangements was of old age, and had limited time left on this earth. I refute this claim. As stated above, I am 21 years old. I know a number of people my age, some slightly older and younger whom support our constitutional arrangements and love our flag, and many more warm to it once they understand its workings.

- *Plebiscites not legally binding:* A plebiscite is only a glorified opinion poll. Questions may be phrased to allow differing interpretations of the question and to gain a preferred result. An example of this would be, ‘*Do you want an Australian as Head of State, or do you want to retain the Queen or King of Britain as our monarch?*’ This question would no-doubt result in the affirmative, as it gives the impression that Australia does not have its own Head of State, and that we are somehow subjugated by a foreign power – which is all obviously false. A question such as ‘*Do you want Australia to become a republic?*’, would undoubtedly be fairer, but a plebiscite is not the right way in which to seek a true outcome. A plebiscite will pass if it receives a simple majority of 50% plus 1. A referendum is a more complex vote requiring both the majority of votes nation-wide plus the majority of votes in the majority of states. This is undoubtedly a fairer way in which to put the question to the people, and would mean that all plans for a republic would have to be laid-out on the table for the Australian public to see. The Republic Referendum held in 1999 lost both nation-wide as well as in *all* states, with 72% of electorates voting against the proposal. Interestingly, most of the electorates for the ‘No’ case were Labor electorates.
- *An unprecedented plebiscite:* No question regarding the constitution in form of a plebiscite has *ever* been put to the Australian people – which for me raise questions about the ethics and morals behind the proposed Bill, and perhaps even the legality of such a plebiscite and its outcomes. Should the plebiscite succeed and subsequent referendums fail, it may well cast doubt on the future of the constitution itself. Amending the constitution is a complex matter which cannot be explained in a simple populist question, and only a referendum on such a matter regarding the constitution should be carried out.
- *What will replace the checks and balances of the Crown?:* A number of high profile republicans, such as former NSW Premier Bob Carr have declared their belief that, should Australia become a republic, the President, Administrator, Governor, etc. Should have no reserve powers, and some have even called for the dissolution of the Senate and removal of the States. A successful plebiscite question on the constitution

would allow republicans and politicians to do as they wish with a blank cheque provided to them by the Australian people under the guise of a 'Yes' vote in a plebiscite. The Crown prevents any one person from assuming absolute power and authority over the Australian people.

- *The cost of a republic:* Sen. Brown estimates that a plebiscite question put to the people at the next general election would cost approximately \$10.5 million. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. There is the following national referendum, and following the result of this, numerous state plebiscites and referenda to officially convert to a republic. Total actual cost up until 2005 on proposals for constitutional change come around the \$129.8 million mark. *Predicted* costs for such things as national and state plebiscites and referenda, election information, labour and material costs to carry out the votes, Presidential elections, changes to the flag, money, military, police, and other government uniforms and institutions conservatively estimate to be approximately \$2.2 billion. Australia cannot afford to waste money at this time of financial concern, particularly on a matter which has already been voted on by the people.

The above reasons as outlined are why I, Brant Rippon, oppose the '*Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Act 2008*', and why I oppose any moves for Australia becoming a republic. Australia has the best political system in the world, and any moves to threaten the peace and prosperity which Australia has experienced for well over a century *should* be opposed. It comes down to the simple fact that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". And any moves to an untried and unknown system which may not work is simply a risk that should not be taken.

Regards,

Brant Rippon