

To whom it may concern,

There is no cause for Australia to become a republic, now or at any time. Senator Brown did not at all mention the fact that in pushing for a plebiscite, rather than a referendum, those pushing for a republic will be under no obligation whatsoever to resolve their disputes over just what sort of republic they want, a process that has stalled and was in no way resolved by the resounding 'no' vote of the 1999 referendum.

The constitution explicitly provides only one avenue through which it may be altered; a referendum. Further, every referendum of modern times has been accompanied by detailed public discussion and debate. In 2009 these are nowhere to be found. Senator Brown invokes opinion polls in his speech accompanying the bill, "Opinion polls consistently showed [prior to the 1999 referendum] that the majority of Australians supported an Australian republic," the operative word here being 'showed'. Australia and Australians have moved on since then. In May of 2008, a Morgan poll found support for a republic with an elected president at only 45%, down more than 10% since 1999, with support in the youngest generation (14-17 y.o.) at only 23%. Other polls over the last two years have similar figures. If opinion polls are a reliable source from which to make an argument then clearly Senator Brown's bill is not only superfluous but outdated as well.

There is no crisis of confidence in the current constitutional arrangement. There have been no failures in the 108-year old system of checks and balances by which Australia is governed and in which the monarchy plays such a crucial, though admittedly often overlooked part. A republic only has any supporters at all due to unreasonable and outmoded ideological imperatives, common sense and reason seem to have been cast aside. Australians are far more concerned with how their government and elected representatives deal with the global financial crisis, climate change, and in NSW (I cannot speak for other states) failing, or failed, education, health and transport systems. Nowhere in his speech does Senator Brown state why Australia should become a republic. If in support of his own bill he will not do so, how can Australians be convinced that there is any need at all to change from the monarchy? He concedes that there was and is a division amongst republicans as to which sort of republic should be put to the electorate in a referendum; that with a directly-elected president or with a two-thirds of Parliament-elected president. The 1998 constitutional convention saw the latter as the most popular. If republicans are still not sure which model would be the most successful, a plebiscite asking a simple 'yes or no' question to an undefined republic will not resolve anything, indeed the Senator offers no clues as to how or when this would be resolved and until it is resolved no referendum would presumably be held thereby making the plebiscite a largely unnecessary and glorified opinion poll and waste of the taxpayers' money.

Having said that, rather than "Do you support Australia becoming a republic?" as the Senator suggests, surely it would be of more help in putting this republican situation behind us if the plebiscite consisted of three options for electors to choose from; "Directly-elected president, Parliament-elected president, support for present system". If Senator Brown still wants to go through with the process of another referendum to try and make Australia a republic after the plebiscite, he can put to the people the most popular republican model in the constitutionally-mandated fashion.

Since at least 1986 and the passage of the Australia Act, Australia has been a

completely independent and self-reliant state. We have an exemplary record of democracy, freedom, stability and standard of living (albeit not for many indigenous communities). The Queen of Australia costs the Australians taxpayer nothing. A Governor-General does not need the expense of an election for a largely ceremonial role and her/his political neutrality has been a remarkable feature of modern times despite the lack of any such codified requirement. Some have argued that Australia needs an 'Australian head of state'. Even putting aside the High Court's decision in, "R v Governor of South Australia [1907] HCA 31; (1907) 4 CLR 1497 (8 August 1907)," which noted that the Governor-General was 'Head of the Commonwealth' (the phrase 'Head of State' not being known jargon at the time), not the monarch, the fact remains that the Governor-General is at the very least the de facto 'Head of State' of Australia, performing all the functions one would associate with a 'Head of State'. If Senator Brown wants this phrase to be codified in the constitution then that is understandable but to suggest that our 'Head of State' is the Queen (whose actions and person, largely through the decisions of previous governments, are rarely felt and seen in Australia) and that our 'Head of State' is not Australian is a disingenuous attempt at garnering support for a republic at best.

My thanks to the Senate Committee on Finance and Public Administration for the opportunity to make this submission,

Best Regards,  
Tim Knapp