

The Secretariat  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Room S1.61  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA  
ACT 2600



**Attention:**

**Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee**

**Subject: Inquiry into an Australian Republic**

Rather than become bogged down in the specifics of a preferred model for the future Republic, which I expect many of your submissions will attempt to do, I intend to limit my submission to the process of the establishment.

I have great confidence in the ability of the ordinary Australian to select an appropriate form of Republic, providing they are given the opportunity to become informed about the various models.

I therefore propose:

1. A range of adult education agencies, and other appropriate bodies, are resourced to conduct a series of study circles to examine the various models being proposed for a Republic. This would, I believe, help to ensure a nucleus of well-informed citizens who can contribute to more informal debates in pubs, workplaces and the letters pages of the newspapers and talkback radio.
2. The Australian Republican Movement be funded to develop a kit for use by the above study circles, based upon the 'Six Models' developed by the ARM.
3. The ballot paper be designed as follows:
  - First section, a simple question along the lines of "*Do you wish to see Australia become a Republic?*"
  - Second section, the Republic model options being considered for Australia. These should be selected by optional preferential vote. This would ensure that the model with the most overall support would be selected. First-past-the-post is a hopelessly antiquated system of voting and could easily result in a 'lowest common denominator' choice. Preferential voting would also obviate the need for expensive run-off ballots.
4. Voting should be compulsory. This is possibly the most important decision that Australians will make this century.

Overleaf, is a copy of an article I had published in the Autumn 2000 edition of 'Adult Learning Australia'.

Yours faithfully

Bob Holderness-Roddam.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Bob Holderness-Roddam". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "R".

IN ORDER TO AGREE ON A MODEL FOR THE REPUBLIC, WE NEED A DEMOCRATIC NETWORK OF STUDY CIRCLES, ARGUES BOB HOLDERNESS-RODDAM.

## Which way is the Republic?

The failure of the 1999 republic referendum has been analysed more than a weekend's footy results. Most of the so-called explanations are symptoms of one fundamental problem. The process was flawed. Put simply, there was far too much debate and not enough deliberation. The differences are as follows.

Debates are the traditional form of decision-making, but are inherently unsuited to rational discussion. They encourage participants to take sides and argue that their opponents' case is flawed. Debates frequently generate more heat than light. Their weaknesses may be summarised as follows:

- the stylised form of debates is counter-productive. It neither seeks nor serves to clarify issues. Instead it entrenches attitudes and encourages petty point-scoring and personal abuse.
- participants are required to present opposing views. Onlookers are simply passive observers limited to clapping, hissing, interjections and so on.
- there is no attempt to seek middle ground or consensus. Generalisations and stereotypes are encouraged, leading to polarisation of the community.
- the outcome is win-lose.
- there tends to be a time limit on debates – more haste, less speed.

There is a far more effective way to encourage public participation in policy development: deliberation, as exemplified by the study circle.

Study circles originated in Scandinavia in the 19th century. They have been credited with transforming Sweden from a backward rural economy into the environmentally and socially conscious modern country that it is today. The main features of a study circle are:

- the aim of the exercise is to examine all the options and to achieve a consensus on the issue, thus generating light rather than heat.
- an independent facilitator clarifies the issues.
- all members participate; there is no passive audience.
- all participants have an equal status and are required to respect other viewpoints, even if they don't agree.
- possibly, the outcome will be win-win.
- the process is open-ended, rather than forced into a rigid time-frame.

Where to from here? A network of community-based study circles could be established to:

- develop a range of options, from *status quo* Monarchy to a range of republic options. There should be no more than five models on the table, to avoid confusion.

- prepare the arguments for and against each model. This process should be thorough, with participants playing devil's advocate where necessary.
- offer Australians the options in a referendum. Voting should be optional preferential, allowing electors to rank the options that they are prepared to accept, without forcing them to vote for options with which they cannot live.

How do we get there from here? The process must be seen to be above the vested interests of political parties and other interests. Those running the process must not be pushing their own barrow. I suggest that Adult Learning Australia be invited (and funded) to organise the study circles Australia-wide. ALA has both the credibility and the experience to do the job. ■

*Bob Holderness-Roddam has been an adult educator since the early 1970s. He has also served over ten years as a local government councillor and on the executive of many community groups.*