



Tuesday 20 April 2021

### LET'S STOP DEFERRING THE REPUBLIC DEBATE

The Queen's birthday this week (21 April) and the recent passing of the Duke of Edinburgh should remind Australians that we should already be debating an Australian republic, says chair of the [Real Republic Australia](#), David Muir.

Mr Muir said the royal family had repeatedly acknowledged that the republic debate was one for Australians to have and make a decision about the future of the nation.

"Members of the royal family from the Queen down and certainly Prince Philip have taken the common-sense view that the republic debate is not a reflection on them," he said. "They have on many occasions stated quite clearly that they view the issue as one for Australians to settle and that they will abide by our decision."

Mr Muir said the latest Real Republic Australia newsletter *Constitutional Conversation* (attached) noted that the late Duke of Edinburgh had been relaxed about the prospect of an Australian republic for many decades.

"Even back in the 1980s he acknowledged that if Australians wanted to become a republic then the royal family would accept the decision," Mr Muir said.

"The Queen was also reportedly quite relaxed about a republic when former prime minister Paul Keating briefed her back in 1993 about his blueprint for the republic debate."

Mr Muir said it was not disrespectful to the British royal family if Australians conducted a republic debate.

"In fact we should already have started it long ago, but there has not been the political will or leadership since Keating for having the discussion," Mr Muir said.

"Even Malcolm Turnbull, a staunch republican, didn't lift a finger to initiate the debate. He preferred the cop-out of waiting until the Queen's reign ends.

"The debate should never be about criticising or belittling the royal family in any way. But by deferring debate Turnbull and others are laying the groundwork for a negative 'get Charles' exercise and that's the last thing we want.

"Seniors royals would be quite comfortable with a republic debate and quite frankly the sooner it starts the better."

Mr Muir said the biggest issue to settle was the model for a republic that was acceptable to Australians.

"As a delegate to the 1998 Constitutional Convention elected on the ticket of former Brisbane Lord Mayor, the late Clem Jones, I supported a directly elected head of state as the model that Australians would support in a referendum," he said.

"Nothing since has changed my mind. The failure at the 1999 referendum of the 'politician's republic' with a head of state essentially appointed by the PM cemented my belief.

"While the ultimate choice of model is up to voters, I firmly believe they will accept only the direct election model which gives them the choice about who becomes head of state in an Australian republic."

Mr Muir said the Real Republic Australia wanted the republic issue to be considered as part of other reforms that could be put to voters through a long-term series of referendum questions to update Australia's Constitution including:

- constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians

- eliminating costly by-elections with a referendum question creating a Senate-style casual vacancy system for the House of Representatives
- four-year, fixed, and synchronised terms for both houses of Federal Parliament to stop prime ministers gaming the system by picking election dates, cutting the number of elections now costing more than \$300 million, and ensuring government mandates are not hostage to Senators elected years earlier
- breaking the constitutional nexus that demands the lower house is twice the size of the Senate – a reform that if not taken would one day see a lower house of 300 MPs and around 150 Senators
- cutting the number of Senators for each state while retaining two apiece for the NT and ACT, and
- constitutional recognition of local government.

“We would like to see all these type of issues debated through a staged, long-term program of public consultations that can draft referendum questions to be put to voters where necessary,” Mr Muir said.

“This process could run over several terms of our Federal Parliament, but once again, the sooner we start the better.”

**MEDIA CONTACT:** 0431 101 533