



Tuesday 5 December 2023

2024 ROYAL VISIT – PM SHOULD MAKE INTENTIONS CLEAR

Chair of the Real Republic Australia, David Muir, says Prime Minister Anthony Albanese should use any announcement of a proposed 2024 visit to Australia by King Charles III as an opportunity to clarify his future plans for constitutional reform and confirm an expected referendum on a republic in his second term if re-elected.

“Just after the 14 October referendum on a First Nations’ voice to federal parliament the Real Republic Australia wrote to the Prime Minister seeking assurances that he was not giving up on constitutional reform including a republic referendum which he had previously indicated would be held in his second term,” Mr Muir said. “We are yet to receive a response to our letter.” **(See copy of letter below)**

Mr Muir said the Real Republic Australia advocated for an Australian to be directly elected by voters as the nation’s Head of State.

“We do not support the concept of politicians choosing a Head of State for us and we do not support the idea proposed by the Australian Republic Movement for more than 800 politicians across the nation handing voters a shortlist of people to pick from. That’s not direct election,” he said.

“It’s appropriate that we continue discussing how we might become a republic so we are all better informed when a referendum is eventually held.

“That discussion is not in any way disrespectful towards King Charles. Like his mother and the late Duke of Edinburgh he has declared that the republic issue is entirely one for Australians to resolve and he will accept the outcome.

“They have taken the same approach to other nations in the Commonwealth, which itself contains 36 republics among its 56 member nations,” Mr Muir said.

Mr Muir said Australians should respect King Charles III for the position he occupied as Australia’s Head of State under the current Constitution, but that did not mean we could not continue discussing ways to use the democratic processes available to us through a future referendum to transition our nation to a republic with its own genuinely directly elected Head of State,.

He said the republic debate should never be used as an opportunity to attack or denigrate the British royal family.

“Within a hereditary monarchy the late Queen Elizabeth and now King Charles fulfill the roles that they inherit so it is fruitless and, we believe, counterproductive to indulge in ‘cheap criticisms of them.

“Our time as Australians is better spent debating and familiarising ourselves with potential republic models and the issues involved in become a republic,” he said.

“The fact republic debate has never been about the late Queen, the current King, nor any single member of the royal family. It has always been about what we as Australians want for the future of our nation.”

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FOR INFORMATION: LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER

Wednesday 18 October 2023

*The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Member for Grayndler
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600*

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Dear Prime Minister

In the wake of the 14 October referendum there has been considerable and largely pessimistic commentary on the likelihood of success of any future referendums necessary to achieve constitutional reforms.

Some of that commentary has included doubts being cast on the staging of the previously proposed referendum on an Australian republic if your government is re-elected to a second term.

Without canvassing all aspects of the post-14 October commentary, a significant element of it has been the suggestion that no referendum should be contemplated unless it has bi-partisan support. Certainly the lack of bipartisan support appears to have assisted the defeat of the voice referendum as it has in the case of several other previous referendums.

However, I believe we should embrace a new approach that can deliver non-partisan support rather than just bi-partisan backing which can never be relied upon.

Prior to any future referendums we need a non-partisan process involving the Australian community that delivers outcomes if we are to achieve real reforms. All eligible Australians cast a simple 'yes' or 'no' vote on a referendum question that refers to an issue about which they will all have varying levels of understanding.

To enable them to decide their position on any question they must be engaged and informed. We should no longer rely solely on relatively 'last minute' advertising campaigns to convince people of the value of supporting a particular reform or reforms.

Having voters informed can best be done by having them involved in the process preceding any referendum. That process must be a non-partisan one, not just bi-partisan.

The Real Republic Australia advocates for a genuine directly elected Head of State in an Australian republic, but we do so within the framework of wider constitutional reform and the comments that follow reflect that position.

There is no doubt that aspects of our Constitution, drafted in the lead-up to the beginning of the 20th century, should be reformed and there are many such proposals that are floated for changing it. But how to do that effectively remains a problem.

If we wish to change the current ratio of eight successful referendum questions out of 45 presented to voters we need a new approach. In 2021 the Real Republic Australia proposed its own [roadmap for reform](#) involving new entities we labelled Australian Constitutional Assemblies that are based on [Citizens' Assemblies](#) used successfully in Ireland to achieve constitutional and law reforms.

Like the Irish template, our suggested Australian Constitutional Assemblies would form part of a long-term reform program and each Assembly would comprise 99 average voters proactively chosen to broadly reflect the composition of the wider Australian community. Led by an independent expert chair, each Assembly would examine a specific proposed reform, hear evidence, filter facts from fictions, and report its recommendations to the federal government which would decide when to hold any referendum.

In the case of a republic referendum we believe such an Assembly should first be formed to hear submissions on possible models and draft a shortlist which should be put to voters in a non-binding plebiscite with the most popular model then proceeding to a referendum.

In that way the model on the ballot paper will not belong to the government, politicians, nor the Real Republic Australia or the Australian Republic Movement or any other group. It will be the people's preferred choice and it will have the best chance of success. That process will also help make Australians familiar with the model being proposed which is important because although it may be simplistic, it's also true – people will not vote for a blank cheque.

The right model is crucial to any republic referendum. The 1999 referendum failed because the wrong model was on the ballot paper. But imagine if no model had been proposed and voters were asked to say 'yes' and allow the parliament to devise a model afterwards. Even republicans would not have copped that.

We should not allow the process of constitutional reform cease or stagnate when there are real and quantifiable benefits that could be delivered by initiatives such as constitutional recognition of local government which has been publicly supported by the National Party leader David Littleproud. As you know such a reform would deliver savings to taxpayers through the more efficient transfer of funds from the federal government to councils.

Four-year and fixed federal parliamentary terms would mean three elections every dozen years instead of four and a saving of more than \$522 million per election according to [Australian Electoral Commission figures](#). In less than three decades well over \$1 billion would be available for other uses.

Who knows what bizarre and baseless claims will emerge via social media in particular about an Australian republic, or even four-year terms, and local government recognition? By holding a community-led Australian Constitutional Assembly well before any referendum is scheduled, any such fake arguments can be floated, tested against the evidence, and can be dismissed early on in the process rather than cloud any referendum campaign.

I am aware that the Labor Party has proposed an Australian Constitutional Commission to help drive constitutional reforms but very little other information has been made available about it. However, if it is to be similar to such commissions established in the past which have been comprised largely of well-credentialed lawyers or jurists, it will not have the necessary roots in the community that are the advantage of bodies like our proposed Australian Constitutional Assemblies or the Irish version that are driven by average voters.

Under our proposal the expertise of legal and constitutional experts can still be harnessed through an Assembly's submission and public hearings process.

I trust you will give consideration to the issues outlined above and I and members of the Real Republic Australia are more than happy to discuss them further with you or anyone you designate.

Yours sincerely,

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