

Past remarks by the late Duke of Edinburgh show.....

Royals always ready

to make way for

a republic



Tributes to the late Duke of Edinburgh have included reference to his very matter-of-fact attitude to many issues.

Numerous obituaries have described him as a person who was very clear-headed and frank, sometimes to the point of bluntness.

All Australians should be reminded that he and Her Majesty the Queen both extended such an attitude to the subject of an Australian republic.

Troy Bramston's book [Paul Keating: The Big-Picture Leader](#), notes that in a 1993 meeting the Queen calmly accepted what was put to her when Keating outlined his plans to kick off a republic debate. She said she would respect the Australian people's wishes and saw the issue as a matter for us to resolve.

When the 1999 republic referendum failed, the Duke of Edinburgh was widely reported to have said about Australian voters: "What's the matter with these people? Can't they see what's good for them?"

In 1981 he was directly recorded as being very relaxed about the prospect of our nation deciding to become a republic.

An edition of the since-defunct weekly magazine *The Bulletin*, revealed Prince Philip's trademark candid view.

The magazine included an article penned by Australian author and historian Geoffrey

Dutton (1922-1998) which referenced a conversation he had with the Duke during a royal tour a few years earlier.

[Dutton](#) was a republican and one of the founders of the Australian Republic Movement. He also edited two books on republican issues – [Australia and the Monarchy](#) in 1966 and [Republican Australia](#) in 1977.

CONTINUED PAGE 2:

Let's set a date for a debate

Monday 14 June will be a public holiday for most Australians to mark the birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, our nation's head of state.



By **DAVID MUIR AM**
Chair
Real Republic Australia

Hopefully they will this year in light of the Duke of Edinburgh's death within weeks of her real birthday and his funeral just days before it.

What Australians also should be doing now is sparing a thought for the future of their own nation and the need for us to become a republic with an Australian as head of state.

This is not a sign of disrespect because it is a debate that we all should have been having



already and it not an "us versus the royals" exercise.

It is not about them.

It is about the future we want for our nation and future generations.

Even the Queen recognises that.

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Former Liberal minister joins republic debate

Former Liberal Party federal cabinet minister Amanda Vanstone recently put forth her views on an Australian republic in one of her regular columns in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The Real Republic Australia thinks it is always encouraging – and pretty rare – to see people associated with the Liberal Party engaging in the republic debate.

We applaud her for canvassing an issue that too many of our current participants in politics at the federal level – on both sides of the parliament – are content to ignore.

Too often they excuse their inaction by pleading that nobody else is talking about a republic.

Ms Vanstone rejects that feeble excuse and shows she is willing to play her role in sparking public debate by filling the vacuum left by her more timid current and former

colleagues. Her views coincide in many respects with those of the Real Republic Australia.

Where we part ways with Ms Vanstone is on the model for choosing a head of state for an Australia republic. She does not favour a directly elected head of state, which is the only option as far as the Real Republic Australia is concerned.

She prefers the already failed "politician's republic" which essentially means the prime minister picks who will be our head of state. Ms Vanstone argues that because referendum questions have such a high failure rate we should "go the minimalist route" to be safe.

Royal problems won't help republicans

What has come over some republicans?

Apparently enthused by the current soap opera clouding the House of Windsor they are planning to release a suggested model for a republic later this year. To infer a correlation between the problems plaguing the royal family and the chance of us voting for a republic is in my view a mistake. It suggests the popularity of otherwise of the royal family is somehow particularly relevant to that issue.

If it's possible to be born with republican opinions I was born a republican. If it were about the popularity of officeholders, I might not have been a republican because Queen Elizabeth II took the throne when I was just a year old. She was then, as now, a popular figure. She radiates decency, responsibility and duty. Running a debate on the future of our constitutional arrangements as though it were an episode of MAFS is embarrassing. Taking a "they're a bunch of misfits" line is unlikely to win over a monarchist.

Amanda Vanstone



Criticising the royal family or playing to the crowd on their current limitations is just dumb. It will not win over any monarchists. Quite the opposite.

Toss in the well known fact that we are as a nation extremely cautious about voting yes in referenda and big neon lights are spelling out that if you want to change, go the minimalist route.

The reason Australia should become a republic is about us, not the Windsors. Over a few hundred years we have developed from a group of colonies into a nation that can and should stand alone. We should not share a head of state.

We need a head of state who has our interests, and only ours, at heart. Someone who feels our heat, smells our excrement. We want someone who not only delights in a magpie's warble but yearns for it. As a country in the Indo-Pacific we should be spelling out to our

neighbours that we, like so many of them, have thrown off the last vestiges of colonialism. Our current constitutional arrangements work fairly well. So why not keep the title governor-general and the title of prime minister? The name to me doesn't matter. It's making matters.

Then comes the question of how to select a governor-general. The current system has the prime minister recommending a person served us remarkably well. What do people say has been so bad about? Monarchists say we can't elect trust politicians. This is superficial gibberish. We elect them. We can sack them. The leader of the government effectively chooses the governor-general. In effect we choose who chooses.

Let's not forget that a shocking appointment would blot the record book of the day and in a historical sense. Every prime minister worries about their popularity and their legacy. We have more power

than we perhaps realise. I'd leave as much as we can the same. Yes, I'd let the prime minister sack a governor-general and vice versa. Political pressure and the cold hard reality of it will make that an extraordinarily rare event. As it ought to be.

If people want to insist on offering a direct elect model they must convince us that good and decent people will be prepared to run the gamut of a public election contest. I can't see people of the calibre of former governors-general such as Ninian Stephen or William Deane being willing to enter that fray. We rightly love our sporting heroes but I'm not sure we see that career as a suitable state. Now that so many earn so much their altruism shines a little less and maybe we have modified our affection for them.

I hope we become a republic in my lifetime. The only way to get that is to offer a model we can all endorse.

Amanda Vanstone is a former Howard government minister and a regular columnist.

Sydney Morning Herald 6 April 2021

Unfortunately the same minimalist model was rejected at the 1999 referendum because – as the Real Republic Australia has always believed – people want a say in who becomes their head of state and represents their nation.

Regardless of that difference we can only congratulate Ms Vanstone for her intervention and hope that others in the Liberal Party – and other parties and independents – start taking an interest in the republic debate as part of the wider issue of constitutional reform that must include recognition of indigenous Australians.

Duke relaxed about republic

FROM FRONT PAGE:

In his [1981 article in *The Bulletin*](#), where he worked as an editor, he argued that Australia should become a republic by the bicentennial year of white settlement in 1988.

Dutton recounted his personal exchange with Prince Philip who basically said if and when Australians decided to become a republic, the royal family would accept the decision. (*See at right*)

Dutton described the royal remark as "a fine, straightforward comment".

He added: "Now, without the slightest ill-will, and severing none of our other ties with Britain, we should tell them that 1988 is the year in which they should go."

The fact that senior royals right up to and including the Queen take such a practical view has been recorded by numerous other reliable observers.

Such a well-documented attitude should strengthen arguments that Australians need to engage in a republic debate sooner not later, as they can be guaranteed it will never offend the royal family.

LINDSAY MARSHALL



KEY CONVERSATION:

A few years ago I was asked to take the Duke of Edinburgh around an exhibition at the Art Gallery of South Australia based on my book, *White on Black*, a study of the representation of the Aborigines by white artists.

We stopped in front of the vanished Tasmanians of Duterrau's masterpiece, *The Conciliation*.

Suddenly, and much to my surprise, Prince Philip turned to me and said: "You're the republican chap, aren't you?" I admitted I was, and complimented him on his homework.

He said: "Well, when you want us to go, tell us, and we'll go."

Geoffrey Dutton in *The Bulletin* 14 April 1981

We must avoid a 'get Charles' campaign

FROM FRONT PAGE:

For too long the one who can initiate a republic debate and referendum – the person sitting in the Prime Minister's Office at any time since Paul Keating – has failed to act.

For too long we've been fobbed off with the excuse that we must wait for the Queen's reign to end.

This was the excuse the supposedly staunch republican Malcolm Turnbull employed to cover his inaction as prime minister.

For too long "debate" has been framed by news reports and commentary employing an irrelevant "us versus the royals" perspective.

A few years ago when the Duke and Duchess of Sussex visited we were told that these and other "young royals" would see off republican thoughts merely by the strength of their popularity.

How times change. The same young royals are now blamed by some for aiding the monarchy's downfall. Both scenarios are shallow oversimplifications.

Those peddling such "analysis" ignore the fact that young royals become old royals.

The Prince of Wales, once a dashing and popular young man, is now often portrayed as an eccentric heir who should be leapfrogged to enable his son to take the throne.

The point is that the republic debate – especially reporting and analysis of it by media outlets and pollsters – must focus on the real issues, not royal personalities and foibles.

It's not about attacking or belittling the British royals.

That's a waste of time if we want a serious discussion on a republic.

The key issue we should be canvassing now is the model to offer voters.

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.



Nothing since has changed my mind.

The failure of the "politician's republic" with an appointed head of state at the 1999 referendum cemented my belief.

It would have been different if we were offered a model giving us a direct say in choosing our head of state. I believe no other model will pass muster.

Right now we should be debating the model. We should never have been content with the Turnbull cop-out of waiting until the Queen's reign to end before debating a republic.

That has always been a recipe for initiating a negative and personal "get Charles" exercise.

Or will we be fobbed off again by being asked to wait until the King's reign ends?

Right now we should also be examining other reforms that could be put to voters through a long-term series of referendum questions to update our Constitution.

Let's settle how we give overdue constitutional recognition to Indigenous Australians – an issue central to our nation's character and values.

We may even resolve the disputes surrounding Australia Day if we decide to

adopt the day we officially become a republic as our new national day.

Why not consider eliminating costly by-elections with a referendum question creating a Senate-style casual vacancy system for the House of Representatives?

Why not ask Australians if they want four-year, fixed, and synchronised terms for both houses of parliament?

That would stop prime ministers gaming the system by picking election dates, cut the number of elections now costing more than \$300 million, and ensure government mandates are not hostage to Senators elected years earlier.

Why not have a referendum breaking the constitutional nexus that demands the lower house is twice the size of the Senate?

Must we persist with a provision that one day will deliver a lower house of 300 MPs and around 150 Senators?

Do states even need 12 Senators, especially when most Australians can't name all those from their own state?

Cutting Senate numbers for each state while retaining two apiece for the territories should be debated. Now.

Why not revisit local government recognition which failed to make the referendum starting line at the 2013 election.

All such issues should be debated through a planned program of public consultations and put to voters at a series of future referendums including one on an Australian republic.

We will have a productive public debate only if we start focussing now on the real issues – none of which needs to wait for the Queen's reign to end.

Latest poll reflects continuing public support, but.....

Model remains the key question

Polling published in March shows continuing strong support for an Australian republic.

But like other polls on the issue, it did not seek the view of those surveyed on their preferred model for choosing their head of state.

The latest research by [Essential Media Communications](#) showed 48% of respondents backed a republic with 28% opposed and 25% unsure.

The results shows a high level of ongoing support for a republic, a fact our national lawmakers seem to continue to ignore.

The poll reveals a strong level of support even in the almost total absence of genuine public debate about a republic and the total absence of political leadership on the issue.

By comparison the 1999 republic referendum showed roughly 45% support in its “yes” vote across the nation.

But a key element missing from this and most other polling on the republic is an assessment of what model voters would support.

This remains a big gap in polling efforts and will hopefully be resolved in future polls if they are to add to the public debate in a meaningful way.

The Real Republic Australia continues to believe that voters will back only a directly elected Australian head of state as opposed to a process in which our head of state is picked for them by Canberra – the so-called “politician’s republic” model foisted upon them at the 1999 referendum which was soundly rejected.

We are confident that even monarchists will back a directly elected head of state once they form the view that a shift to a republic is inevitable.

People want a say in who becomes their head of state and the Real Republic Australia has always maintained a position of supporting such a model.

The Essential poll also found that a large proportion of younger Australians, including one-third of women aged 18-35 “don't know” if they support or oppose a republic.

This could reflect the fact that several generations have been born and grown up since the issue was last on the national agenda at the time of the failed 1999 referendum.

It is further evidence of failed political leadership on the republic issue and a misguided focus on an “us versus the royals” discussion in most reporting on the republic issue.

The fact remains that the republic has little to do with the British royal family.

It is all about Australians and Australia’s future.

Even Her Majesty the Queen and other senior royals know and accept that.

E. Essential Report

Q To what extent would you support or oppose Australia becoming a republic with an Australian head of state?

	Mar'21	Nov'18	May'18	Jan'18	Jan'17
TOTAL: Support	48%	44%	48%	44%	44%
TOTAL: Oppose	28%	32%	30%	29%	30%
Unsure	25%	24%	22%	26%	26%
Base (n)	1,100	1,028	1,025	1,038	1,015

- Support for republic is now at 48%, consistent with previous years.
- Support for a republic with an Australian head of state is strongest among Labor (52%) and Greens voters (52%). Those aged over 55 were most likely to oppose the establishment of a republic (35%).
- A third of women and those aged 18-35 (both 33%) are unsure on their support or opposition to Australia becoming a republic.

	Total	Gender		Age Group			Federal Voting Intention			
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Labor	TOTAL: Coalition	Greens	TOTAL: Other
Strongly oppose	16%	18%	14%	9%	14%	23%	14%	20%	6%	23%
Somewhat oppose	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	10%	17%	14%	9%
Somewhat support	24%	23%	26%	27%	24%	22%	26%	25%	23%	19%
Strongly support	23%	32%	15%	18%	25%	26%	27%	22%	29%	26%
Unsure	25%	16%	33%	33%	25%	17%	23%	17%	28%	24%
TOTAL: Oppose	28%	29%	26%	21%	26%	35%	25%	37%	20%	31%
TOTAL: Support	48%	55%	41%	45%	49%	48%	52%	47%	52%	45%
Base (n)	1,100	539	561	332	382	386	382	389	92	122

The tables are drawn from the full report on the results of a fortnightly omnibus survey conducted by Essential Research with data provided by Qualtrics. The survey was conducted online from 24 to 28 March 2021 based on 1,100 respondents. Due to rounding some tables may not total 100% and subtotals may vary.

Survey shows support for indigenous recognition



A survey conducted by two universities shows almost 62% support for a First Nations' voice to the federal parliament.

The [2021 Australian Constitutional Values Survey](#) by CQUniversity and Griffith University was undertaken in February as a nationwide online survey involving more than 1,500 Australians.

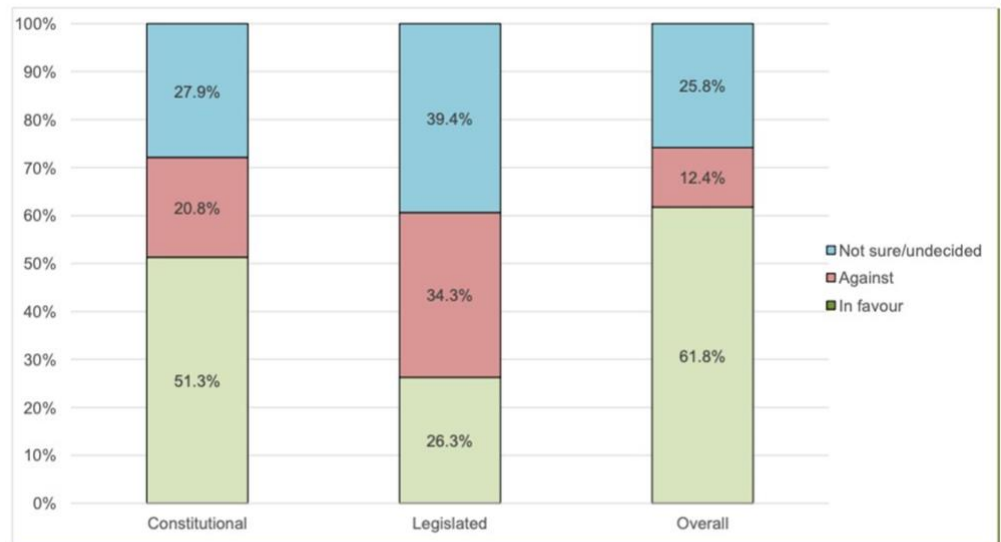
In-principle support for a voice to parliament of 61.8% in the survey was slightly higher than the 60.7% recorded in the previous 2017 survey.

But between 2017 and 2021 the proportion of respondents opposing an indigenous voice fell from 30.4% in 2017 to 12.4% this year, and the figure for "undecideds" grew from 8.9% to 25.8%.

The survey also showed more than half of all those who responded (51.3%) were in favour of a voice to parliament being enshrined in the Australian Constitution.

Just more than a quarter (26.3%) said they would still support a voice as a legislated initiative without constitutional recognition.

SUPPORT FOR FIRST NATIONS VOICE (2021)



"Overall" = In favour of the Voice as either a constitutional or legislated option, or both; Against the Voice (both options, i.e. irrespective of whether constitutional or legislated), Undecided (remainder, i.e. undecided on both, or undecided on one and against the other). See over for questions...

CQU lead researcher, [Dr Jacob Deem](#), said low support for a legislated voice without giving constitutional recognition suggested that Australians wanted to be included in the reform.

"A majority of Australians view the Voice as the right course of

action, and they want to be a part of that step in Australian history," he said. "Compared to constitutional reform, a purely legislative voice would deny Australians a significant chance to participate in the change."

Foundation lead researcher, Professor AJ Brown of Griffith

University's said there was a need for political leadership to make the voice and Indigenous constitutional recognition a success.

Professor Brown said the results showed major room for more public education and engagement about the voice.

STATE BREAKDOWNS (2021 and 2017)

%	AUSTRALIA (INC. ACT AND NT)		NSW		VIC		QLD		SA		WA		TAS	
	2017 (n=1526)	2021 (n=1456)	2017 (n=418)	2021 (n=458)	2017 (n=385)	2021 (n=362)	2017 (n=256)	2021 (n=300)	2017 (n=176)	2021 (n=119)	2017 (n=192)	2021 (n=145)	2017 (n=65)	2021 (n=38)
SUPPORT/ IN FAVOUR	60.7	61.8	62.1	63.1	63.3	66.7	59.5	56.9	55.5	57.2	56.7	58.9	43.9	74.0
NOT SUPPORT/ AGAINST	30.4	12.4	28.8	10.2	28.1	11.2	33.2	16.0	31.3	11.0	32.9	13.6	49.1	10.9
CAN'T SAY/ UNDECIDED	8.9	25.8	9.1	26.8	8.6	22.1	7.3	27.1	13.1	31.8	10.5	27.5	7.0	15.1
TOTAL*	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*'Prefer not to say' responses from 2021 removed

At the time of the 2017 survey, wider public discussion of the Voice was fairly new and had not engaged with the implications and significance of constitutional reform. Despite the reference to the Constitution in the question, we therefore expect that many respondents were engaging with the broad concept of a First Nations Voice rather than a specifically constitutionally enshrined model when completing the question. Accordingly, the comparison to overall support for the Voice in 2021 is most useful.

Republics dominate the Commonwealth



The second Monday in March – March 8 this year – is marked as Commonwealth Day – an event celebrated by [the Commonwealth](#) to highlight how its 54 member nations are “working together for prosperity, democracy, and peace”.

The organisation’s membership consists of former British colonies or dominions, like Australia, and is headed by the British monarch Queen Elizabeth II.

Her son and heir, the Prince of Wales, is set to take over her role – a succession she clearly sought and which was [accepted by member nations](#).

The Queen’s father, King George VI, was the previous head of the Commonwealth.

The [modern Commonwealth began](#) at the 1926 Imperial Conference where the

leaders of Australia, Canada, India, the then Irish Free State, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa, agreed with British leaders to form an organisation of equal members within the then British Empire.



King George VI

This community was called the British Commonwealth of Nations, later dropping “British” to become the Commonwealth of Nations, often shortened to just the Commonwealth.

The original member countries all had

WEIGHT OF NUMBERS:

Of the 54 member nations of the modern Commonwealth:

- 33 are republics,
- 16 have Queen Elizabeth II as their head of state, including Australia,
- five have their own monarchies.

the British monarch as their head of state.

When India gained its independence from Britain in 1947 it became a republic and didn't owe allegiance to the king but wanted to stay a member of the Commonwealth.

A meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers in London in 1949 issued what was known as [the London Declaration](#).

It said that republics and other countries could be members of the Commonwealth.

Today the majority of Commonwealth countries are republics. Other members are making plans to become a republic. (See below)

All have no trouble working within an organisation headed by a constitutional monarch.

In the public debate over an Australian republic, opponents of change may point to the Commonwealth and claim our nation’s membership and influence on the world stage would be diluted if we become a republic.

History shows they are wrong.

A BREAKDOWN.....

REPUBLICS

33

Bangladesh
Botswana
Cameroon
Cyprus
Dominica
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
Guyana
India
Kenya
Kiribati
Malawi
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Nauru
Nigeria
Pakistan



Rwanda
Samoa
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
South Africa
Sri Lanka
Tanzania
Trinidad and Tobago
Uganda
Vanuatu
Zambia

COMMONWEALTH REALMS

16

Antigua and Barbuda
Australia
Bahamas
Barbados
Belize
Canada
Grenada
Jamaica
New Zealand
Papua New Guinea
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Solomon Islands
St Vincent and the Grenadines
Tuvalu
United Kingdom



Barbados sticks to its target

The Caribbean island nation of the Bahamas is still planning to transition to a republic in time to mark the 55th anniversary of its independence from Britain later this year.

In September last year the government of Prime Minister Mia Mottley [announced plans to move to a republic](#) by Independence Day on 30 November.

If the shift is achieved, Barbados would follow other nations in the Caribbean that have adopted a republican form of government.

Guyana removed the British Queen as head of state in 1970, followed by Trinidad

and Tobago in 1976, and Dominica in 1978.

There had been speculation that the need for Barbados to devote time and resources to fight the coronavirus pandemic might cause it to modify the original timetable.

But Ms Mottley said the republic proposal would be advanced regardless and in time for the independence celebrations this year.



Mia Mottley

MONARCHIES

5

Brunei Darussalam
Eswatini
Lesotho
Malaysia
Tonga



German hybrid model floated

An Australian academic living in Germany has floated a hybrid model for choosing a head of state in an Australian republic.

Daniel Gregory completed a PhD in philosophy at the Australian National University and is now a Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellow at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen in Germany.

He [recently outlined](#) on the *Independent Australia* website the German model for choosing a head of state.

Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, is head of government, similar to a prime minister, and the head of state is President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Mr Gregory said Merkel was chosen by the parliament, the Bundestag, and appointed by the President – similar to Australia where the party leader supported by the majority of lower-house MPs is appointed by the Governor-General.

Mr Gregory also explained how the head of state was chosen in the German federation of 16 states.

"In Germany, every five years (or earlier, if a President leaves office early), a Federal Convention is assembled.

"The Federal Convention comprises two groups. One of these groups consists of every member of the Bundestag.

"The other group, of equal size, is determined by the governments of the Federal states.

"Each Federal state sends a number of representatives proportionate to its size.

"Usually, the representatives which a state government sends will themselves be members of that state's parliament, but they do not have to be. Eminent people and celebrities are also chosen.



Daniel Gregory

"The Federal Convention, so constituted, then elects the president."

Mr Gregory said the process involving so many politicians may be rejected by Australians as being too similar to the model that failed at the 1999 referendum.

But he said objections may be softened if the assembly was comprised of all federal MPs plus an equal number of non-

MPs directly elected by voters.

"There is no reason that the latter group should consist of politicians," he said.

"Australians could elect whoever they wished to sit in this assembly, which would meet only once for the single purpose of electing a president."

He said republicans who felt strongly that an Australian head of state should be determined by the parliament alone or by voters alone might dislike the hybrid model.

"But if there is one model which might win majority support – which would sufficiently appeal to sufficiently many people – this might be it," he said.

Editor's note: *The Real Republic Australia supports a direct election model for choosing an head of state in an Australian republic but recognises the need to canvass other models.*

Some housekeeping matters to ponder

YOUR SAY

With the recent passing of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, there was media coverage of his early comments about Australia becoming a republic.

He seemed to suggest that Australia should do so, as long as it was done politely and with respect. I am sure those who support the Real Republic would be able to accede to this request.

I have been thinking ahead to the functional requirements of a Presidential office, including staffing, appropriate premises and any additional services, including support services, required to assist the operations of the Office of the President.

For instance, one assumes the president will occupy Government House. But there could be a case for commissioning a modern office and residence in a new location, with the current Government House becoming a tourist attraction.

A new branding campaign could occur, with the president occupying the "Opal Office", a play on the Oval Office of the US President and taking account that Australia's national gemstone is the opal.

This term was used infrequently to describe Prime Minister Julia Gillard's office by one journalist, but it was not taken up by the mainstream media.

Similarly, a key feature of the current arrangements is that of a Royal Commission, or in Tasmania, a Commission of Inquiry.

From the Tasmanian Government website, a Commission of Inquiry is essentially the same as a Royal Commission, in that they both are established by Royal Assent and contain similar powers.

The terms are interchangeable, but what matters is the powers with which they are provided by legislation.

Relevance to a republic? Well, the Royal Commission or Commission of Inquiry would need to be replaced by a "Presidential Commission" which would have the same function and powers as the former. This would be part of the branding of the new president.

There must be numerous other functions and services that would need to be updated and rebranded.

Whilst the official Federal Government position is to support the Constitutional Monarchy, there are many in the Coalition who privately support a republic.



Government House a case for a replacement?

As such, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet should be tasked with Whilst the official Federal Government establishing a unit to facilitate the planning of a republic. Otherwise, it might take a Labor win at a future election to do so.

Either way, a great deal of planning needs to take place anticipating that a republic referendum is carried, similar to the administrative and legal arrangements for Brexit, which took several years.

So as to seeing a president in place, the sooner planning for an Office of the President starts the better.

**Catherine Sullivan
Queanbeyan NSW**

Have your say. Email us at:
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Our newsletter

Constitutional Conversation is published quarterly by the Real Republic Australia.

It aims to foster public debate about potential changes to the Australian Constitution including a republic with a head of state elected directly by the people of Australia.

The Real Republic Australia was founded by Brisbane's longest-serving Lord Mayor, the late Clem Jones (1918-2007) and other delegates to the 1998 Constitutional Convention in Canberra who advocated for the direct-election republic model.

In line with his wishes, the Real Republic continues to campaign for a republic based on the direct-election model with support provided by the Clem Jones Group.

The Real Republic supports a range of changes to the Constitution that will improve the workings of government:



Clem Jones

- A directly elected head of state.
- A head of state with oversight of anti-corruption measures.
- Constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians.
- Constitutional recognition of local government.
- Fixed and synchronised four-year terms for both Houses of Parliament.
- Addressing the nexus dictating the relative sizes of both Houses of Parliament.
- Reducing the number of Senators.
- Applying the casual vacancy system of the Senate to the House of Representatives.
- Making the process for calling a referendum fairer.

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Labor's republic plan untouched



The recent federal Labor Party national conference retained the party's current commitment in its platform to an Australian republic. (Text below)

But the virtual conference did not canvass the issue and the party has made no effort yet to place it on the public agenda in the lead-up to the next federal election.

However, the spat between the Duke and Duchess of Sussex and elements within

the royal household prompted Labor's republic spokesperson to declare the need for a public debate on the republic question. (See story below)

At the 2019 federal election Labor promised a plebiscite asking Australians if they wanted the nation to become a republic. But the plan did not include also asking voters about their preferred republic model.

CHAPTER 6: STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY

7. Labor supports the Recognition of First Nations peoples in the Australian Constitution, including an enshrined voice to the Parliament, as outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. In partnership with First Nations people, Labor will develop a concrete proposal for constitutional recognition which has the broad support of the First Nations people and fosters public support for change.

8. Labor supports and will work toward establishing an Australian republic with an Australian head of state.

9. Labor believes that other constitutional

reforms, such as fixed, four-year terms for the House of Representatives and the Senate and the recognition of local government in the Australian Constitution, should be progressed through a new and independent Australian Constitutional Commission.

10. Labor supports recognising local government in the Australian Constitution.

11. An Australian Constitutional Commission would work with the Australian people and government to ensure that our Constitution remains relevant to the lives, values and aspirations of our nation and our people.

MP says: It's time for a public debate

The federal Labor Party's spokesperson for the republic, Matt Thistlethwaite, says it is time for a concerted public debate on how Australia could transition to a republic.

Mr Thistlethwaite, the shadow assistant minister for the republic and MP for the Sydney seat of Kingsford-Smith, said: "I think it's time for Australians to begin a serious discussion about our next head of state.

"I think that the time has come for us to once again begin that serious discussion, for our political leaders to put this back on the agenda," he [was reported as saying](#).

He said the process should include a public

education campaign, a referendum, and then the appointment of an Australian as head of state.

"We need to begin a serious discussion about recognising our independence and maturity, the fact that we govern ourselves, make our own decisions, and we should reflect that by having one of our own as a head of state.

"At the end of the day, Australia's future has very little to do with the British royal family."



Thistlethwaite

Television project looks to the future

A story about an Aboriginal woman who becomes the Republic of Australia's first president has been funded for development by Screen Australia.

Rainbow Girls, billed as a television comedy/drama, is based on the character of Rachel Radford – a Ngannawal woman – being sworn in to office in 2045.

At the same time 24-year-old Abigail Bread becomes the first woman in 2,000 years sworn in as a Freemason.

The Fiction Bureau Pty Ltd received funds to develop the project as part of Screen Australia's 2020-2021 program that provided \$730,000 to support development of six feature films, 12 television projects, and three online projects.