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GOLD COAST INPUT IN REPUBLIC DEBATE IS VITAL

The Real Republic Australia says public debate on an Australian republic must not be dominated by those in Canberra, Sydney or other big capital cities.

Speaking on the Gold Coast today, chair of the Real Republic Australia, David Muir, said Assistant Minister for the Republic, Matt Thistlethwaite, had indicated his plan to begin a “listening tour” across the nation next year.

“The Real Republic Australia itself has just released a comprehensive discussion paper seeking feedback on our model for a republic with a genuine directly elected Head of State,” Mr Muir said.

“The discussion paper – available at realrepublic.au – sets out our ideas but we really want to hear the views and ideas of people on the Gold Coast.”

Mr Muir said it was appropriate to begin canvassing the issues involved in moving to an Australian republic because many Australians were unfamiliar with the process of changing the Australian Constitution.

“The last referendum was held in 1999 when questions on the republic and a preamble recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were both defeated,” he said.

“The last successful referendum questions were passed in 1977 when Anthony Albanese was 14 and Peter Dutton was 6.

“There is a high bar for amending the Constitution – the so-called ‘double majority’ requiring a nationwide ‘yes’ vote across all states and the NT and ACT plus a majority ‘yes’ vote in a majority of states but excluding the territories.

“Those criteria have seen only eight out of 44 referendum questions approved since Federation in 1901 which is why we believe the more public discussion we have, the more informed voters will be on referendum day in the next term of Federal Parliament if the Albanese Government is re-elected.”

Mr Muir said the Real Republic advocated for an Australian to be directly elected by voters as Australia’s Head of State, and did not support the concept of politicians picking a Head of State.

“We also do not support the idea of politicians handing down to voters a shortlist of candidates which is the model adopted by the Australian Republic Movement,” he said. “That is simply not direct election.

“It too closely echoes the ‘politicians’ republic’ model that failed at the 1999 referendum because voters did not want politicians picking their Head of State for them.”

Former state Liberal Party leader and Gold Coast MP, Bob Quinn, said the Real Republic Australia discussion paper was an important addition to the public debate.

“I support a republic and a directly elected Head of State,” Mr Quinn said. “The discussion paper offers a chance for others to have their say.

“Not everyone will agree with everything in the discussion paper, but at this stage it is important to start the debate.

“It is too soon to start detailed drafting of new clauses for the Constitution. That’s for the government’s legal experts at a later date. Right now we need to put forward ideas and let Australians, especially in regional communities, have their say.”

Mr Quinn said it was also important that state and territory governments start examining the issues involved in the nation’s transition to a republic if and when a referendum succeeds.

“The federal government through people like Matt Thistlethwaite need to encourage state and territory governments to begin planning for the changes they may need to implement if a republic referendum succeeds,” he said.

“They should not be caught flat-footed by a successful referendum and unnecessarily delay the introduction of an Australian republic,” he said.

Mr Quinn said there were supporters of a republic in all parties across the political spectrum.

“But we need to consider issues based on facts, which is why the discussion paper and feedback from the people of the Gold Coast is so important,” he said.

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