

FAQS



WHY CHANGE TO A REPUBLIC?

We are almost one-quarter of the way through the 21st century and it is almost 125 years since Federation when the former British colonies agreed to form a nation called Australia.

Australia should by now be a genuinely independent nation. We should be standing on our own two feet on the world stage.

We can never do that as long as our Head of State is the British monarch and not an Australian.

Under current constitutional arrangements no Australian can ever be Head of State of Australia. That role will always be given to whoever is the British monarch.

That situation is especially intolerable when you consider that nobody descended from our continent's First Nations can ever be Australia's Head of State. Ever.

The current constitutional monarchy has served us well but the time is long overdue for us as a nation to move on to become a republic and choose our own Head of State from among us.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY?

As provide during her reign and at the time of her death, most Australians had respect and affection for Queen Elizabeth II whose 70-plus years on the throne made her one of the great historical figures of all time. That respect towards the British monarch, now King Charles III, would not diminish when we become a republic.

But the UK monarch's primary allegiance will always be to Britain and will never be to Australia.

While the royal family may view our nation and its people in positive terms, their primary interest has never been and will never be Australia. It will always be Britain.

Senior royals play a major role domestically and abroad promoting Britain, British values, and British industry, investment, exports, and tourism. They do not do the same for Australia.

By contrast, a directly elected Australian Head of State would promote our values, talents, resources, and opportunities on the world stage, and that will translate into a stronger economy and more secure jobs now and in the future.

We believe Australia must have its own Head of State to represent our nation and its people on the world stage.

AREN'T YOU ATTACKING THE ROYALS?

The campaign for a republic should never involve denigrating members of the British royal family. It is not about them.

It is about Australians making decisions on our future and our place in the world as a truly independent nation.

Senior members of the British royal family have said that they would respect any decision we make to become a republic.

They recognise that the issue is for us to debate and for us to decide our future as a nation.

Senior royals, especially the Monarch at any given time, have little or no say in the roles they are born into. They are not asked, but are told to fulfil those roles, so there is nothing to be gained by attacking them.

The debate must focus on us as Australians and what we want for our nation.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL IS AN AUSTRALIAN, ISN'T THAT SUFFICIENT?

Most of our early Governors-General came from Britain. But even though Australians have been appointed to the position since the mid-1960s, they still represent the British Monarch, as they always have.

Who becomes Governor-General may be decided by the Australian Government but they are still formally appointed by the British Monarch.

Some monarchists opposing an Australian republic try to argue that we don't need one because the Governor-General is Australian and is our Head of State.

The claim is simply not true. It has been dismissed by constitutional scholars.

In addition, in correspondence in January 1999 with Buckingham Palace officials the then Governor-General Sir William Deane noted that the argument was being used by monarchists in Australia. In response the officials described it as "nonsense" and stated unequivocally that the Monarch was Australia's head of state.

Even monarchist and former prime minister John Howard has also dismissed the argument.

In addition, [Section 2](#) of our Constitution states clearly that the Governor-General is merely the Monarch's representative.

Australia, just as they are made welcome when visiting other republics such as the USA or in the 34 republics that are among the 54 members of the Commonwealth.



Queen Elizabeth II's appointment of David Hurley as Australia's Governor-General

WOULD THE ROYALS BE WELCOME IN AN AUSTRALIAN REPUBLIC?

Members of the British royal family would continue to be welcome when they visit. Australians would also continue to make welcome members of other royal families from around the world when they visit.

ISN'T A DIRECTLY ELECTED HEAD OF STATE INCOMPATIBLE WITH A WESTMINSTER-STYLE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT?

The Republic of Ireland shows how a Westminster-style system can seamlessly accommodate an elected Head of State.

Ireland has a [national parliament](#) with upper and lower houses, like ours.

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From The Australian Monday 15 August 2022: "An ardent royalist, Howard praises the Queen, rebuking those who argue the Governor-General is actually Australia's Head of State."

An ardent royalist, Howard rebuked those who argue the Governor-General is Australia's head of state. And he mocks those who claim vice-regal correspondence. Sir John Kerr and Buckingham Palace proves the Queen authorised the Whitlam government's dismissal, saying there is no such evidence.



During the election campaign the Liberal Party "tell that it could just get by on arguing that it could manage things better." says Howard Picture: No. 10/10

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Its national government, like ours, is led by the person sitting in the lower house who commands a majority of seats there or the support of a majority of lower-house MPs.

As in Australia, that person is the Prime Minister – or to use the Irish term, the [Taoiseach](#) – and is head of the executive government.

The Irish head of state, the [President of Ireland](#), is elected in a nationwide vote and exercises powers codified in the Irish Constitution.

Experience also shows that Ireland's directly elected head of state can lift the profile of the nation on the world stage.

The fact that the Irish President is directly elected gives the position added credibility at home and when travelling abroad representing the nation and its people.

Unlike our Governor-General, the Irish head of state is not viewed as merely representing another individual residing in and with allegiance to another nation.

WOULDN'T AN ELECTED HEAD OF STATE BE A RIVAL SOURCE OF POWER TO A PRIME MINISTER?

By codifying, or clearly spelling out, the powers of a head of state and requiring them to be advised by or consult with the government through the Prime Minister means such a problem would not arise.

Under such arrangements the Irish President is not a rival source of power to the Irish Prime Minister but can and does lead national discourses on important non-partisan issues.

Opponents of a directly elected Australian head of state often argue that an elected head of state would usurp the powers of the leader of the executive government.

But they what the fail to acknowledge is that

codifying the powers of a head of state can avoid any such conflict.

They also fail to acknowledge that under our existing Constitution the Governor-General can already be a rival source of power.

For example, [Section 68](#) makes the Governor-General the commander-in-chief of our nation's military forces. There is no mention of the Governor-General needing to consult with the government or be advised before exercising this power. It is only through custom and convention that the government maintains supremacy in this regard.

Codifying this and other powers of an elected head of state would ensure that there could never arise a situation in which our nation's military capabilities were ever exercise by anyone other than the democratically elected executive government led by the Prime Minister of the day.

IF WE BECOME A REPUBLIC WOULD WE LEAVE THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS?

Australia as a republic would continue to play a major role within the [Commonwealth](#) just as other republics do.

Although it began as a forum for former British colonies, numerous countries after gaining their independence and after becoming republics have chosen to remain members.

In fact today 36 republics form the vast bulk of the Commonwealth's 56 member nations and at least four are not even former British colonies.

AREN'T THERE MORE IMPORTANT ISSUES TO DISCUSS INSTEAD OF THE REPUBLIC?

This is not an argument but a delaying tactic.

Usually those who try to make a case for delaying debate actually do not want a debate at all. They actively promote the idea of inaction merely as an excuse to retain a constitutional monarchy.

None of these type of arguments has stopped other countries moving to become republics in recent years.

The Caribbean and Commonwealth nation of Barbados changed to a republic in November 2021 and others in the region are planning similar moves.

King Charles III, then Prince Charles, attended the transition ceremony in Barbados and said that the shift to a republic was "a new beginning" and part of its development as a nation.

Australians are mature enough to consider more than one issue at a time. To suggest otherwise is insulting.

The Albanese Government has said its priority for its first term in office is to resolve the issue of constitutional recognition of our First Nations. But it has [also signalled plans](#) to hold a republic referendum in its second term if it is re-elected.

That means we need to be discussing the issues involved in changing to a republic now, not later, so that Australians are better informed by the time a debate starts in earnest leading up to any referendum.



The Commonwealth

WHO WOULD APPROVE A MOVE TO A REPUBLIC?

A shift to a republic requires amendments to our Australian Constitution which can be made only on the approval of voters at a referendum.

At a referendum Australian voters cast a vote "yes" or "no" to a question asking if they approve of a proposed law to alter the Constitution.

HOW EASY IS IT FOR A REFERENDUM QUESTION TO BE APPROVED?

The bar for constitutional change is set high by the Constitution itself.

Any referendum question needs what's called a "[double majority](#)" for a "yes" vote to be successful. It means any referendum question must not only secure a majority of "yes" votes nationwide (including the NT and ACT), it must also secure a majority of "yes" votes in a majority of the states (excluding the two territories).

This high threshold for the approval of a referendum question is one of the reasons that since Federation in 1901 only eight out of 44 referendum questions put to voters have succeeded.



In 2013 the President of Ireland, Michael Higgins, (centre above) launched his Ethics Initiative to foster community discussion about the challenges of living together ethically and what values and actions Ireland should prioritise as a nation. It built on an earlier initiative called Being Young and Irish which sought views and ideas from young people about their country's future.

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The best chance of success for a republic referendum is if Australians are familiar with the issues involved, and if the model most acceptable to them is put to a referendum.

WASN'T THE ISSUE SETTLED IN 1999 WHEN AUSTRALIANS VOTED DOWN A PROPOSAL TO BECOME A REPUBLIC?

On Saturday 6 November 1999 Australian voters were asked to vote "yes" or "no" if they approved of:

A proposed law: To alter the Constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic with the Queen and Governor-General being replaced by a President appointed by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Commonwealth Parliament.

At the same time they were asked a second referendum question on a proposed preamble to the Constitution recognising Indigenous Australians.

Neither question succeeded in securing a nationwide majority "yes" vote and no state reported a majority "yes" vote.

Just because a referendum failed in 1999 does not mean we can't revisit the republic issue, especially in light of the advent of new generations of voters since the question was last put.

WHY DID VOTERS NOT SUPPORT THE 1999 REPUBLIC REFERENDUM?

Put simply, the wrong model for a republic was put to voters in November 1999.

A [Constitutional Convention](#) was held in Canberra over 10 days in February 1998 consisting of 152 [appointed and elected delegates](#). Its role was to devise a republic model to be put to a referendum.

But the Convention spent most of its time on a futile "republic versus the monarchy" debate among delegates when it

should have been devoting its efforts to devising a republic model that would have been supported by sufficient voters to pass at a referendum.

The model that emerged from the Convention involved the appointment of our head of state by at least a two-thirds majority vote of the Federal Parliament.



Delegates to the Constitutional Convention at Old Parliament House in Canberra, February 1998

This model – soon dubbed the "politicians' republic" – did not even secure majority support among Convention delegates. The vote was: 73 "yes" votes ; 57 "no", and 22 delegates abstaining.

The model did not allow for Australians to vote for a head of state and so it was rejected at the 1999 referendum.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THE "POLITICIAN'S REPUBLIC" CAUSED THE REFERENDUM TO FAIL?

In the periods prior to both the February 1998 Constitutional Convention and the November 1999 republic referendum, opinion polling showed Australians were willing to support a shift to a republic.

But then, now, and at any future republic referendum, whether Australians will vote for a republic depends entirely on the model they are being offered.

[Newspolls](#) taken in the lead-up to the November 1999 republic referendum showed strong support for a republic.

In an August 1999 poll a total of 51% of respondents were in favour of a republic – 30% strongly in favour and 21% partly in favour.

The poll showed 35% of respondents opposed a republic and 14% were uncommitted.

The fatal flaw when it came to referendum day was the model being offered to voters – they did not like the idea of a "politicians' republic".

The tragedy is that this strong voter resistance had already been identified by Newspolls.

Advocates of a directly elected head of state also knew that community sentiment was strongly against the model being presented to voters at a referendum in a "take it or leave it" manner.

A September 1999 Newspoll showed 50% of respondents supported a directly elected head of state compared with just 14% support for the model that was to be voted on at the November 1999 referendum.

Another Newspoll in October 1999 showed 46% backing for a republic with a directly elected head of state but only 15% for the "politicians' republic".

The defeat of the November referendum was not surprising.

Voters simply balked at having someone else choose their head of state for them. We believe that sentiment has not changed.

REPUBLIC REFERENDUM RESULTS 6 NOVEMBER 1999		
STATE	% YES	% NO
NSW	46.43	53.57
Vic	49.84	50.16
Qld	37.44	62.56
WA	41.48	58.52
SA	43.57	56.43
Tas	40.37	59.63
ACT	63.27	36.73
NT	48.77	51.23
National	45.13	54.87

WOULD A DIRECT-ELECTION MODEL HAVE PASSED AT THE 1999 REFERENDUM?

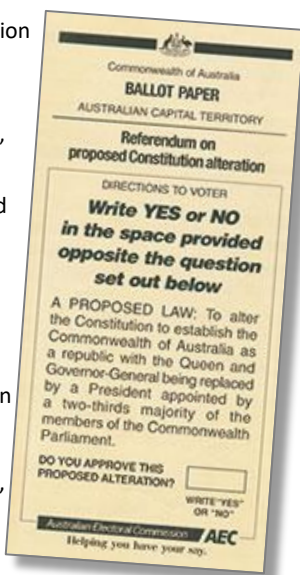
It is not possible to claim that a model for a directly elected head of state would have secured sufficient voter approval at the 1999 referendum.

But it is certain that it would have stood a far better chance of success than the "politicians' republic" model that was comprehensively rejected.

A 2002 [Newspoll](#) showed that three years after the failed referendum more people continued to support a direct-election model over a "politicians' republic" by 46% to 12%.

Most significantly, it showed that when uncommitted voters or those opposed to a republic were hypothetically faced with the inevitability of change, they opted for a direct election model over a politician's pick – by 79% to 18%.

This suggests that constitutional monarchists – when faced with a choice of politicians appointing their head of state or voters having a direct say through the ballot box – will opt for a directly elected head of state.



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HOW CAN WE BE SURE WE DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AGAIN?

Australians need to "own" the model that goes forward to the next referendum held to decide if we become a republic.

The Real Republic Australia has proposed establishing a new system of Australian Constitutional Assemblies to engage average voters in examining constitutional reforms including a republic. They would draft a shortlist of workable republic models which would then be the subject of a national non-binding plebiscite.

The model that emerged from that plebiscite with the greatest support should be the one that proceeds to a referendum. We are confident it would be a direct-election model because that is the model Australians have strongly and consistently supported.

Our plan means the model put to a future referendum will not belong to any pro-republic group or individual. It will belong to Australians and will have the best chance of success.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

The Real Republic Australia has released a discussion paper outlining a workable model for a genuinely directly elected Head of State in an Australian republic.

The discussion paper is part of our efforts to let Australians have their say on our proposals and to find out the ideas they may have about how we might transition to a republic.

Key to our model is the codified powers were propose for a Head of State that ensure they can never be a rival source of power to the Prime Minister leading the elected government in our Federal Parliament.

Visit our website realrepublic.au to download a copy and send us your thoughts.

DOES THE AUSTRALIAN REPUBLIC MOVEMENT OFFER A DIRECT-ELECTION MODEL?

The ARM's latest model is problematic largely because it is not a genuine direct-election model.

The ARM has drastically widened the involvement of politicians in the process of determining an Australian head of state.

The rejected 1999 model backed by the ARM was the "politicians' republic" requiring a Head of State

to be chosen by at least a two-thirds majority of federal MPs.

In its new model the ARM now wants to also involve every MP in every state and territory parliament in the process of picking our head of state. It suggests each state and territory parliament chooses one candidate each and the Federal Parliament chooses three candidates.

The 11 candidates picked by politicians would then be offered to voters to have their say.

Having politicians hand down to voters a list of approved candidates is not a genuine direct-election model.

It is a turbocharged politicians' republic and we believe it will not gain sufficient voter support to pass a referendum.

ISN'T CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE JUST A HOBBY-HORSE OF THE "ELITES"?

Changing our Constitution to have an Australian as Australia's Head of State is only part of the work of the Real Republic Australia.

We view it as an opportunity to raise a number of other potential future reforms to modernise our Constitution and deliver real benefits to all Australians.

We believe there is also a need for:

- fixed four-year terms for both houses of the Federal Parliament to save the cost of running elections [now estimated](#) at close to \$400 million,
- synchronised elections for both house so that Senators serve for the same four years as lower house MPs,
- breaking the constitutional nexus that mandates the House of Representatives must be [twice the size of the Senate](#) and reducing Senate numbers with the positions cut potentially being transferred to the lower house to improve representation,
- implementing a Senate-style casual vacancy system for the House of Representatives to avoid costly by-elections,
- constitutional recognition of First Nations as proposed by the Albanese Government,
- constitutional recognition of local government, and
- establishing a fairer process to initiate referendums and to ensure the views of voters in the territories are counted in both parts of the "double majority" needed to pass a referendum question.

Our nation deserves a Constitution for the 21st century and we should consider reforms that improve the way our nation is governed, improve our democracy, foster greater engagement in our political system, and deliver more integrity and accountability as well as long-term savings to taxpayers.



The Real Republic Australia was founded by Brisbane's longest-serving Lord Mayor, Clem Jones, and other delegates to the February 1998 Constitutional Convention held in Canberra where they had unsuccessfully advocated for a republic with a directly elected Head of State.



Clem Jones

Since his death in 2007, the Real Republic Australia has continued to campaign for a republic based on a genuine direct-election model with support provided by the Clem Jones Group.

We also publish a quarterly newsletter *Constitutional Conversation* which aims to foster debate on an Australian republic as well as promote the need for a number of other constitutional reforms that would improve our national governance and benefit all Australians.



Contact us to add your name to our newsletter e-mailing list.

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