



Monday 15 March 2021

LET'S DRINK TO THE IRISH REPUBLIC MODEL

St Patrick's Day this week (Wednesday 17 March 2021) is a good opportunity to move on from the personality-driven discussion of members of the British royal family and focus on specific and workable elements of the Irish system of government that could be adopted as part of a move to an Australian republic, according to chair of the [Real Republic Australia](#), David Muir.

Mr Muir said Ireland's system of government – a Westminster-style executive led by a prime minister and cabinet but also having a directly elected president – showed what was possible in Australia.

"There is always a lot to celebrate about the Irish on St Patrick's Day, but we should do more than raise a glass of Guinness," Mr Muir said. "We should take the time to seriously consider aspects of Ireland's republican model that we would do well to adopt.

"The key to securing support for an Australian republic is the model put to voters at any referendum. The 1998 Constitutional Convention and the 1999 referendum both failed because Australians have never wanted 'a politicians' republic' with a head of state chosen for them by the Federal Parliament.

"From my time as an elected delegate to the 1998 Constitutional Convention on the team led by former Brisbane Lord Mayor, the late Clem Jones, I have always believed that the only republic model Australians will support is a directly elected head of state.

"For anyone with doubts about how a directly elected head of state would mesh with our current system of government, I urge them to look to Ireland.

"For more than 80 years the Irish have shown that an elected head of state can work within a Westminster system of government with its usual features of having an upper and lower house of parliament and a prime minister who heads an executive cabinet.

"The Irish Constitution sets out the processes for electing the nation's president, their powers and responsibilities in office, and procedures for their removal and replacement if necessary. It outlines the membership of the Council of State including the Irish Prime Minister and other senior government officials as ex-officio members and its role as an advisory body to the president.

"There are rules for the handling of nominations for those seeking to be Ireland's head of state, spending caps on electioneering, and provisions for declaring elected any eligible candidate who stands unopposed, thereby saving the cost and effort of a national election."

Mr Muir said Ireland also benefitted from having a workable structure to address suggestions for constitutional changes.

"Ireland also operates a system of citizens' assemblies constituted by the government when constitutional changes are contemplated," he said.

"Each citizens' assembly comprises an independent expert chair plus 99 citizens who randomly selected but who broadly reflect the nation's demographics. They are tasked with examining proposed constitutional changes and can hear from experts and then furnish recommendations which the government either progresses to a referendum or explains why it won't.

“This broad-based and people-focussed system effectively eliminates the political partisanship that has stymied most attempts at constitutional changes in our country.

“In 2019 I had the opportunity when in Ireland to meet several senior government and judicial officials as well as a academics and a key adviser to current President Michael Higgins.

“Those discussions confirmed that a republic model with a directly elected head of state model works well there and would work well here.

“Everyone from taxi drivers to those senior public officials were happy with the role of an elected head of state in a Westminster system.

“Successive Irish Presidents have chosen to advocate on issues of community concern. Current President Michael Higgins focuses on social justice issues and events to benefit charities and NGOs.

“For anyone who unjustly fear a second source of power rivalling executive government, the Irish model suggests the president is more a source of influence and the two operate together successively.”

Mr Muir said discussing individual members of the British royal family would not advance the republic debate.

“We need to focus on the mechanics of a republic starting with a preferred model which I believe must be a directly elected head of state, or else the same failures we saw in 1998 and 1999 will be repeated if and when a referendum question is put to Australian voters,” he said.

MEDIA CONTACT: 0431 101 533