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REPUBLIC REFERENDUM SHOULD CONSIDER SCRAPPING BY-ELECTIONS

The prospect of five federal by-elections and the loss of another Senator all point to the need for a referendum sooner not later on Constitutional changes including Australia becoming a republic and adopting a casual vacancy system for the House of Representatives, according to the Real Republic Australia group advocating a directly elected head of state and other real reforms.

Chair of the Real Republic, David Muir, said the group wanted a public debate and referendum on an Australian republic in addition to other Constitutional reforms delivering real benefits to Australians.

“Already WA voters face the prospect of a by-election to fill the seat of Perth, and now four other lower house MPs have quit in the wake of the High Court’s ruling against Senator Katy Gallagher,” Mr Muir said.

“Contrary to what Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull says, we should be debating the republic question right now so a referendum can be held sooner rather than later.

“The Real Republic believes we should also be debating other real reforms to our Constitution and processes of government including any necessary changes to Section 44 covering the citizenship of MPs but also real reforms such as adopting a casual vacancy system for the House of Representatives.

“We should consider changes that could eliminate costly and disruptive by-elections for the lower house, along the lines of the current system for filling Senate vacancies.”

Mr Muir said Australians wanted real reforms not empty symbolism, and that meant a directly elected Australian as our nation’s Head of State, not one chosen for them by politicians.

“The 1999 referendum that followed the 1998 Constitutional Convention failed because all it offered was a model for politicians picking our head of state, not one directly elected by the people,” he said.

“The Real Republic wants to go further and give a directly elected Head of State a role in appointing and overseeing anti-corruption and integrity bodies at the federal level instead of the current unhealthy practice of politicians appointing the agencies and individuals overseeing their behaviour.”

Mr Muir said a referendum on Australia becoming a republic should include other questions for additional Constitutional changes delivering real reforms including:

- recognition of Indigenous Australians,
- changes to the Senate including fewer Senators for each state,
- synchronised elections for the lower and upper houses of Federal Parliament and four-year terms,
- applying to the House of Representatives the casual vacancy system now used by the Senate, and
- local government recognition to remove any doubt about the validity of direct federal funding.

“We believe the real reforms we are putting on the table will deliver real benefits and savings to Australians,” he said.

The Real Republic was founded by the late Dr Clem Jones AO — former long-serving Lord Mayor of Brisbane, businessman, and philanthropist and other delegates to the 1998 Constitutional Convention held in Canberra.

Mr Muir said the Real Republic organisation continued to be supported by the Clem Jones Group.

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