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DON'T WASTE REFERENDUM ON POLLIES' CITIZENSHIP

Any referendum to clear up problems with the citizenship status of federal MPs will be a waste if it doesn't include questions on the model for an Australian republic, says the group pushing the direct-election model for Australia's head of state, the Real Republic Australia.

Real Republic chair, David Muir, said news stories that Prime Minister Turnbull is to receive a special report on how to remedy the citizenship problem for some MPs showed it was possible to hold a referendum on a republic sooner rather than later.

"I don't think Australians will be impressed if a referendum at the next federal election focusses only on the question of citizenship for MPs and doesn't also allow them to have a say on a republic, recognition of indigenous Australians, and other possible real reforms," Mr Muir said.

"It means a valuable opportunity being wasted on a single issue that in many cases has been a problem only because some MPs failed to meet the standards required to run for office.

"Malcolm Turnbull says we shouldn't even debate a republic before the end of the Queen's reign, so if there is a referendum at the next election it will be confined to fixing the self-inflicted mess some MPs have created.

"The Prime Minister's approach means we can't take the opportunity to use a possible referendum to also allow Australians to have their say on a republic, the type of republic they want, and Constitutional reforms like recognition of indigenous Australians.

"This will be a valuable opportunity totally wasted if he continues that approach."

Mr Muir said the key to the republic debate was not the personalities of the Queen, Prince Charles, or others in the British royal family.

"The key issue is the model that Australians want and we know that the 1999 referendum was a rejection of a 'politicians' republic' with an appointed head of state," he said.

"Australians want to have their say and that means the best model is a directly elected head of state.

"It's unproductive for the Prime Minister and others to delay debate and frame it around Australia's relations with the British royal family.

"Most Australians realise that the warmth and respect they show towards Queen Elizabeth II and members of the British royal family will not diminish when we are a republic. Even the royals themselves know that.

"That's why the Prime Minister is wrong to defer debate until the Queen's reign ends, and his tactic means the debate becomes a 'get Charles' discussion.

"We should not have a negative debate. We need a positive debate about Australia's future," he said.

Mr Muir said the Real Republic wanted other real reforms to be considered during the republic debate including:

- Constitutional recognition of indigenous Australians.
- changes to the Senate including fewer Senators, synchronised terms for both houses of parliament so a government's mandate was not held hostage by Senators elected years before,
- adopting a casual vacancy system to filling lower house seats between elections to avoid costly by-elections, and
- recognition of local government.

"But the central issue in the republic debate will always be the desire by Australians for one of our own as our head of state and to have the opportunity to choose that individual through a direct election," he said.

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