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PALACE LETTERS CONFIRM NEED FOR AUSTRALIAN HEAD OF STATE

The contents of the “Palace Letters” released today are of secondary importance to the continuing and overriding need for Australians to vote for a republic and to elect their own head of state, according to the chair of the Real Republic Australia, David Muir.

Mr Muir said the Real Republic Australia wanted the republic question considered as part of a wider package of Constitutional reforms to deliver cost savings and more stable government.

“Naturally there is legitimate interest in the Palace Letters and what they may reveal of the late Sir John Kerr’s motives and state of mind in November 1975,” he said.

“A clearly intriguing aspect of the letters is that Sir John was clearly canvassing the option of sacking Gough Whitlam with our head of state, but not with the prime minister himself.

“But the mere fact he was corresponding with the Queen underlines the fact that our head of state is a monarch sitting on a hereditary throne in a foreign land.

“If Australia is to develop a truly independent role and image on the world stage we need to elect one of our own as head of state. That time is long overdue.

“But a republic will not eventuate will be true only if our political leaders continue to do nothing to revamp our Constitution.

“This is an issue that requires true leadership. There will always be varying views on a republic and on the model for a republic.

“What’s needed is a process that allows Australians to have their say on a model for a republic, preferably to approve one that involves the direct election of our head of state, and then to proceed to a referendum.

“But the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that Constitutional questions can arise over issues such as border closures that may bear detailed examination and potentially the need for adjustments to our Constitution to ensure all governments know their role and responsibilities in a similar future crisis.

“Our political leaders need to outline a plan for debating potential Constitutional changes and for consulting Australians not just on a republic but for other reforms to our Constitution that can deliver real benefits.

“In the past 25 years only Paul Keating used his position as our nation’s leader to initiate and shape the debate. Every person who followed him as prime minister — including supposed vehement republican Malcolm Turnbull — did nothing to advance the debate.”

Mr Muir said the Real Republic Australia supports a republic with a directly head of state as well as other basic Constitutional changes to benefit Australians, including:

- investing in our elected head of state the role of appointing and overseeing those responsible for integrity and anti-corruption agencies at the federal level;
- recognition of indigenous Australians,
- parliamentary reforms to deliver greater stability through cutting Senate numbers for each state from 12 to the original six while maintaining two for each Territory;
- implementing synchronised, fixed, four-year terms for both Houses of Parliament to ensure voter mandates are reflected in both Houses; and
- adopting a casual vacancy system for the House of Representatives to deliver greater stability and cut costs to taxpayers; and
- recognition of local government.

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The Real Republic Australia is supported by the Clem Jones Group which carries on the work of Brisbane's longest-serving Lord Mayor, businessman, community worker, and philanthropist, Dr Clem Jones, who was a delegate to both the 1975 and 1998 Constitutional Conventions. Dr Jones died in December 2007 and in his will he expressed his wish for a national campaign for a republic based on his preferred model of a directly elected head of state. The Real Republic Australia continues his campaign.