

# “POLITICIANS’ REPUBLIC” POLEAXED



The November 1999 republic referendum failed because the wrong model was put to voters.

The source of the defeat can be traced to the failure of the Constitutional Convention held in Canberra February 1998 to devote sufficient time to developing a model for a republic that would have received voter approval at a referendum.

The 152 delegates to the [10-day Convention](#) spent too long on a futile monarchy-versus-republic debate instead of working on a model.

On the first day of the 1998 Constitutional Convention, former Brisbane Lord Mayor and an advocate of a directly elected Head of State, the late Clem Jones, called for the question on whether or not Australia should become a republic to be resolved by day three rather than by day 10. His aim was to allow more time for drafting an acceptable model for a republic, but the motion was lost.

In the end the Australian Republic Movement’s model that emerged from the Convention – the appointment of a Head of State by a minimum two-thirds majority vote of MPs in the Federal Parliament – could not secure majority support even among delegates who voted:

- 73 “yes”,
- 57 “no”, and
- 22 delegates abstaining.

The model was quickly dubbed “the politicians’ republic” and went on to inevitable defeat at the November 1999 referendum.

The tragedy of the events of 1998 and 1999 is that the preference of voters for a directly elected Head of State was clear well before the failed 6 November 1999 referendum.

Historical figures from [Newspolls](#) published by *The Australian* newspaper (below) show that in the months leading up to the Constitutional Convention in February 1998 (from September to December 1997) a majority of those polled favoured a republic.



Constitutional Convention delegates

Similarly, in August 1999 just a few months out from the November referendum, Newspoll showed a majority of respondents giving their in-principle backing to an Australian republic.

An [analysis](#) by constitutional law expert, the late [Professor George Winterton](#) of the University of NSW, cited a Newspoll published in *The Weekend Australian* on referendum day had accurately forecast its defeat while also reporting support for a republic running at 74% to 23%.

Such evidence shows the referendum failed because the wrong model was offered to voters.

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NOW THINKING ABOUT WHETHER AUSTRALIA SHOULD BECOME A REPUBLIC, ARE YOU PERSONALLY IN FAVOUR OR AGAINST AUSTRALIA BECOMING A REPUBLIC? IF IN FAVOUR - IS THAT STRONGLY IN FAVOUR OR PARTLY IN FAVOUR? IF AGAINST - IS THAT STRONGLY AGAINST OR PARTLY AGAINST?

	TOTAL ADULTS														
	MAR 1995	JUN 1995	FEB 1997	JUN 1997	SEPT 1997	NOV 1997	DEC 1997	JAN 1999	FEB 1999	MAR 1999	JULY 1999	AUG 1999	MAR-APR 2000	JULY 2001	NOV 2002
STRONGLY IN FAVOUR	28	28	27	27	33	31	32	29	30	33	29	30	33	39	33
PARTLY IN FAVOUR	19	22	20	22	21	21	19	19	21	16	17	21	19	13	18
<b>TOTAL IN FAVOUR</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>51</b>
PARTLY AGAINST	15	15	12	14	15	15	15	15	13	11	15	14	15	12	13
STRONGLY AGAINST	19	20	16	16	15	18	20	20	20	23	19	21	20	23	22
<b>TOTAL AGAINST</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>
UNCOMMITTED	19	15	25	21	16	15	14	17	16	17	20	14	13	13	14

  

	NOVEMBER 2002							
	TOTAL ADULTS	SEX		AGE			COALITION SUPPORTERS	LABOR SUPPORTERS
		MALE	FEMALE	18-34 YEARS	35-49 YEARS	50 YEARS & OVER	%	%
STRONGLY IN FAVOUR	33	39	27	33	32	32	21	48
PARTLY IN FAVOUR	18	18	19	24	19	14	16	16
<b>TOTAL IN FAVOUR</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>64</b>
PARTLY AGAINST	13	11	15	13	15	12	19	8
STRONGLY AGAINST	22	18	26	15	18	31	30	17
<b>TOTAL AGAINST</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>25</b>
UNCOMMITTED	14	14	13	15	16	11	14	11

NOW I'D LIKE YOU TO CONSIDER THREE BROAD POSSIBILITIES FOR AUSTRALIA IN REGARDS TO A REPUBLIC. ONE POSSIBILITY IS TO CHANGE TO A REPUBLIC WITH A PRESIDENT WHO IS **ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE**. A SECOND POSSIBILITY IS TO CHANGE TO A REPUBLIC WITH A PRESIDENT WHO IS **APPOINTED BY PARLIAMENT**. AND A THIRD POSSIBILITY IS TO **NOT CHANGE ANYTHING**, KEEPING THE QUEEN AND THE GOVERNOR GENERAL IN THEIR CURRENT ROLES. WHICH **ONE** OF THESE THREE POSSIBILITIES WOULD YOU YOURSELF **MOST PREFER?**

	-----NOVEMBER 2002-----									
	SEPT 1999 TOTAL VOTERS %	OCT 1999 TOTAL VOTERS %	TOTAL ADULTS %	---SEX---		-----AGE-----			COALITION SUPPORT- TERS %	LABOR SUPPORT- TERS %
				MALE %	FEMALE %	18-34 %	35-49 %	50+ %		
CHANGE TO A REPUBLIC WITH A PRESIDENT DIRECTLY <b>ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE</b>	50	46	46	51	42	53	46	40	34	58
CHANGE TO A REPUBLIC WITH A PRESIDENT <b>APPOINTED</b> BY PARLIAMENT	14	15	12	15	8	9	14	12	12	12
<b>NOT CHANGE ANYTHING</b> KEEPING THE QUEEN AND THE GOVERNOR GENERAL IN THEIR CURRENT ROLES	32	36	40	33	48	37	38	45	52	29
UNCOMMITTED	4	3	2	1	2	1	2	3	2	1

Extracts from national Newspolls conducted for The Australian September 199 to November 2002

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Again, it is not possible to determine if a model for a directly elected Head of State would have met the high bar set by [Section 128](#) of the Australian Constitution.

It requires a referendum question to secure a “double majority” – a majority “yes” vote across the nation (in all states and territories) as well as a “yes” vote in a majority of states (excluding the territories).

But historical Newspoll figures (*above*) show a republic with a directly elected Head of State outpolling “the politicians’ republic” by at least three-to-one even in the months prior to the 1999 referendum and continued to do so three years later.

Professor Winterton’s analysis also referenced a *Sydney Morning Herald/AC Nielsen* poll from early August 1999 showing 54% of respondents supporting a republic in principle and 32% against.

“Significantly, that margin would have increased to 67% to 24% had a direct-election model been offered,” he wrote.

Importantly, Newspoll figures from 2002 (*below*) show that when uncommitted voters or those opposed to a republic were hypothetically faced with the inevitability of change, they opted by a huge majority – 79% - for a direct election model.

The poll showed that under that scenario support for a “politicians’ republic” was just 18%.

This strongly suggests that even 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.

The Real Republic Australia has always advocated for a republic with a Head of State elected directly by Australian voters.

We offer a model under which any Australian who meets strict eligibility criteria can seek to stand for election as Head of State in a nationwide ballot.

We do not support the appointment of our Head of State by politicians or parliaments.

We do not support politicians handing down to voters a list of approved candidates from which they can take their pick.

That is not a real direct election and we believe it is a recipe for another referendum defeat.

We believe possible models for a republic should be first put to voters in a non-binding plebiscite that asks two questions – first of all if they back a republic and, if so, what model they think is best for our nation.

Only then will the next republic referendum give voters the best choice of model – one belonging to the Australian people and not to us or any other pro-republic group.

The Real Republic Australia is confident that a real direct election model will be preferred by most Australians at any plebiscite and at any subsequent referendum.

## Preferences for a republic if Australia decided to become a republic

PRESIDENT DIRECTLY ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE  
 PRESIDENT APPOINTED BY PARLIAMENT  
 UNCOMMITTED

TOTAL ADULTS %
79
18
3

(Question asked of those choosing to not change anything or uncommitted - AND IF AUSTRALIANS DECIDED THAT AUSTRALIA SHOULD BECOME A REPUBLIC, WOULD YOU PREFER TO CHANGE TO A REPUBLIC WITH A PRESIDENT DIRECTLY ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE OR, A PRESIDENT APPOINTED BY PARLIAMENT?)

Extracts from Newspoll based on interviews with 1,200 voters across Australia on 1-3 November 2002



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