



Monday 14 June 2021

ROADMAP FOR A REPUBLIC AND OTHER REAL REFORMS

The [Real Republic Australia](#) says as Australians in most states except Queensland and Western Australia mark the Queen's birthday on Monday 14 June, they should spend a moment to consider a possible "roadmap" to involve them in a plan for long-term reform of the Australian Constitution including the transition to a republic.

Real Republic Australia chair, David Muir, said a framework known as an Australian Constitutional Assembly should be established to engage Australians in a process leading to beneficial reforms of the way government operates.

"The Real Republic Australia has always advocated an Australian republic with a directly elected head of state," Mr Muir said. "We believe no other model will secure sufficient support to pass at a future referendum.

"The failure of the so-called 'politicians republic' at the 1999 referendum – having politicians in Canberra choose a head of state for us – simply will not wash. Nor will any hybrid model between that and a direct election model.

"While a republic is a central issue for us we also want to see a process established that can be used to engage Australians in long-term constitutional reforms to deliver better and more efficient and effective government."

Mr Muir said an Australian Constitutional Assembly – modelled on the Citizens' Assembly process used in Ireland – would have 99 members sourced by professional market research techniques in a bid to broadly represent the characteristics of the Australian community. An independent chair would be appointed by the Federal Parliament.

"No member of any legislative body would be entitled to join an Assembly – a feature that reinforces the fact that the Constitution is not the property of politicians but belongs to the people of Australia.

"An Assembly would have 12 months to examine a proposed constitutional reform and make recommendations which a federal government would need to address and explain why a particular issue would be put to a referendum or why no reform would be attempted.

"We believe this is an effective way to achieve constitutional change because it will help extract from the current process the politically partisan approach by major parties that has been largely responsible for having only eight out of 44 referendum proposals passed since Federation."

Mr Muir said an initial Australian Constitutional Assembly should consider lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and determine if any adjustments should be made to federal and state government powers to ensure future pandemics can be handled swiftly and effectively.

He said other issues that could be considered through the Australian Constitutional Assembly process included:

- eliminating costly by-elections with a referendum question creating a Senate-style casual vacancy system for the House of Representatives
- four-year, fixed, and synchronised terms for both houses of Federal Parliament to stop prime ministers gaming the system by picking election dates, cutting the number of elections now costing more than \$300 million, and ensuring government mandates are not hostage to Senators elected years earlier
- breaking the constitutional nexus that demands the lower house is twice the size of the Senate – a reform that if not taken would one day see a lower house of 300 MPs and around 150 Senators
- cutting the number of Senators for each state while retaining two apiece for the NT and ACT, and
- constitutional recognition of local government.

Mr Muir said the Real Republic Australia supported constitutional recognition of First Nations' people in the Constitution but did not seek to use the Australian Constitutional Assembly process to address it because the Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017 had initiated the latest public debate on the issue and its resolution should not be deferred or delayed.

He said key features of the Australian Constitutional Assembly process included:

- A separate Assembly would be formed by resolution of the Federal Parliament for each constitutional reform issue, or group of issues, to be considered.
- Each Assembly would set its own work plan and would engage with the wider community and experts in the issue it is considering and be required to deliver a report and recommendations within 12 months.
- An Assembly large than 100 members could be established by parliamentary resolution.
- The Assembly approach should be ongoing to allow for the regular updating of our Constitution.

Mr Muir said a larger Assembly could be formed to deal with the republic issue and, together with a national plebiscite, could determine a model to be put to voters at a referendum with a high likelihood of success.

“We are confident that any objective assessment of republic models will determine that one with a directly elected head of state, again like the system used in Ireland, is the only one that will be acceptable to voters.

“As a delegate to the 1998 Constitutional Convention elected on the ticket of former Brisbane Lord Mayor, the late Clem Jones, I supported a directly elected head of state as the model that Australians would support in a referendum,” he said.

“Nothing since has changed my mind. The failure at the 1999 referendum of the ‘politician’s republic’ with a head of state essentially appointed by the PM cemented my belief,” he said.

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