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SUNSHINE COAST INPUT IN REPUBLIC DEBATE IS ESSENTIAL

The Real Republic Australia says discussion of an Australian republic must start now but should not be dominated by those in Canberra, Sydney or other big capitals should not fall prey to “toxic” point-scoring.

On the Sunshine Coast today, chair of the Real Republic Australia, David Muir, and former state Liberal Party leader, Bob Quinn, said all Australians needed to be well informed about the issues involved in becoming a republic before a referendum was held as expected in the next term of federal parliament if the Albanese Government was re-elected.

Mr Muir said the Real Republic Australia had released a comprehensive discussion paper – **available at realrepublic.au** – seeking feedback on its model for a republic with a genuine directly elected Head of State.

“The discussion paper outlines our ideas but we want to hear the views of people throughout the Sunshine Coast because we don’t want regional voices to be drowned out by those in Sydney or Canberra,” he said.

“Our model is for a genuine direct election of our Head of State – with nobody standing between candidates and voters. Our discussion paper is called *Your Choice/the People’s Choice* which summarises our approach.

“Our Head of State should not be chosen for us by a hereditary system and should not be picked for us by politicians. We should choose who is our Head of State through a genuine direct-election model.”

Mr Muir and Mr Quinn, a supporter of a republic with a directly elected Head of State, urged a polite, respectful, facts-based, and non-partisan approach to the debate in the lead-up to a referendum.

While on the Sunshine Coast they met and briefed prominent constitutional monarchist June Upton on the Real Republic Australia’s model and discussion paper.

“We believe monarchists should take an interest in the republic models on offer because if a republic referendum looks like it will pass, then they should be prepared beforehand to make a decision on what model they would prefer if a republic is likely to be inevitable,” Mr Muir said.

“We respect the reasons June supports the current system and we don’t expect to change her mind and she won’t change our views, but in the end we are all Australians who simply support different ideas and we need to know the facts on both sides of the debate.

“Too many public debates today are far too ‘toxic’ and we don’t want to see the republic debate derailed or descend into a slanging match. Certainly we don’t want to see it become an excuse for attacking or denigrating the royal family.”

Mr Quinn said the Real Republic Australia discussion paper was an important addition to the public debate.

“The idea of an Australian republic is one that crosses party lines so the last thing we need is a partisan political debate,” Mr Quinn said.

“The discussion paper is an avenue for people to become more familiar with the issues involved and to have their say on a genuine direct-election model.

“Not everyone will agree with everything in the discussion paper, but at this stage we need to start the debate. It is too soon to start detailed drafting of new clauses for the Constitution. That’s for the government’s legal experts at a later date.

“Right now we need to put forward ideas and let Australians, especially in regional communities, have their say.”

Mr Quinn said it was also important that state and territory governments start examining the issues involved in the transition to a republic if and when a referendum succeeded.

“The federal government needs to include state and territory governments from the very early stages of the process leading up to a referendum so that governments at all levels can begin planning for the changes they may need to implement if a referendum succeeds,” he said.

“They should not be caught flat-footed by a successful referendum and unnecessarily delay the introduction of an Australian republic.”

Mr Muir said it was appropriate to begin canvassing the issues involved in moving to an Australian republic because many Australians were unfamiliar with the process of changing the Australian Constitution.

“The last referendum was held in 1999 when questions on the republic and a preamble recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were both defeated,” he said.

“The last successful referendum questions were passed in 1977 when Anthony Albanese was 14 and Peter Dutton was 6.

“There is a high bar for amending the Constitution – the so-called ‘double majority’ requiring a nationwide ‘yes’ vote across all states and the NT and ACT plus a majority ‘yes’ vote in a majority of states but excluding the territories.

“Those criteria have seen only eight out of 44 referendum questions approved since Federation in 1901 which is why we believe the more public discussion we have, the more informed voters will be on referendum day in the next term of Federal Parliament if the Albanese Government is re-elected.”

Mr Muir said the key issue to be resolved in the republic debate remained: Why can’t an Australian be Australia’s Head of State?” Mr Muir said. “We should think back to 2000 when even the monarchist John Howard as PM did not think it appropriate for a monarch of another nation to open the Sydney Olympics. What will happen in 2032 in Brisbane?

“Other Commonwealth countries have made the move to ensure they are truly independent on the world stage – 36 out of 56 member nations are republics – and none has done so out of disrespect for the royal family.

“Our discussion paper puts forward ideas for eligibility criteria, how to limit campaigns and campaign spending, but most importantly it outlines the sort of powers we want to see codified in law or in the Constitution to ensure an elected Head of State is never a rival to the PM.

“We want a genuine directly elected Head of State. We do not support the Australian Republic Movement’s idea of more than 800 federal and state politicians handing down to voters a shortlist of candidates.

“That is not direct election and echoes the ‘politicians’ republic’ model that failed at the 1999 referendum because voters did not want politicians picking their Head of State for them.”

Mr Muir said the Republic of Ireland showed how a directly elected Head of State could work comfortably within a Westminster-style parliamentary system and never be a rival to a prime minister leading a cabinet government.

He said even monarchists should take an interest in the republic models on offer as a referendum approached.

“If a republic referendum fails, we keep the current constitutional monarchy with King Charles III as our Head of State,” he said. “But if there are indications of a successful referendum, then monarchists should be prepared beforehand to make a decision on what model they would prefer if a republic looks like being inevitable.”

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