

Women for an Australian Republic
Our Republic - the Future

23 April 2008

Dear Prime Minister

We seek clarification of the 2020 Summit outcome on the Republic. There appear to be some differences between Mr John Hartigan's speech at the Report Back Session on Sunday 20 April and the contents of the Initial Report of the Summit posted on the Summit website.

Our Group seeks information to allow for informed discussion about the Summit recommendations at the Republican Gathering in Sydney on 17/18 May 2008. Minister Faulkner - or another representative of the Government - has been invited to attend this conference and meet with active republican groups to discuss the way forward on the Republic.

Mr Hartigan stated that there should be a first-step plebiscite to "sever" ties with the UK (this appears to be the threshold question: YES/NO on the Republic) and that that would be followed by a referendum to "choose between models" (we assume this means not models for the republic but between methods for choosing the head of state).

The Initial Report, however, states that the first-step plebiscite would be to end ties with the UK (appears to be same as para 3) with the Governor-General retaining titles and powers for five years, while models, including new models, are explored, discussed and understood. There is no mention of a following referendum.

We would appreciate having some clarification of the two statements and an indication of whether they are really the same but some things got lost in the drafting (?).

In particular, it would be helpful for us to understand:

- a) if both propositions include a first step plebiscite followed by a referendum
- b) what the proposed timeline for the one/two stages to proceed is
- c) if a time for implementing the Republic was proposed at the Summit - we heard discussion of a Republic by 2010 or 2015 in the Governance Group but the outcome outlined above proposes no timeline - if so, we assume that implementation may go beyond 2020?

Based on our current understanding of what was proposed at the Summit, Women for an Australian Republic's views are:

a) that the timeline in the Initial Report could extend well beyond 2020 with no guarantee of a finalising referendum (this could even be beyond the likely tenure of the current or inclined Government)

b) that that Summit proposal is minimalist in the extreme and not likely to appeal to voters - many people think the republic is unfinished business and should be finalised as soon as possible, not left to languish (for instance, how many (new)selection methods do voters need to explore and understand?)

c) that the Summit proposal is the wrong way around - the non-binding indicative vote should canvass a range of issues on the Republic eg do you want a Republic? What selection method do you favour for the head of state (hos)? What should hos be called? Should the hos' powers be defined? What should the Australian Republic be called? and that the following referendum should deal essentially with the threshold question of YES/NO on the republic.

d) that the Republic should not be left in the hands of the politicians and constitutional lawyers (particularly the latter); they do not represent public opinion on the Republic.

In fact, we believe that the great idea that should have come from the Summit is "to put the Republic in the hands of the people" and let them decide what it should be like and how constituted. Dealing with the variables at plebiscite first will allow this to happen (and it's a non-binding result on the Government). We fear that if that doesn't happen - for a second time - the proposition will fail again.

A copy of this email has been sent to both the Attorney-General and to the Special Minister of State.

Yours sincerely

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National Convenor