

WOMEN for an **Australian Republic**

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13 September 2010

The National Commission – Anzac Centenary
Department of Veterans' Affairs
PO Box 9998
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Commissioners

This submission addresses the themes of community engagement and education, public awareness and community access.

Introductory Comments on National Identity

As far as national identity is concerned, the Anzac Centenary has the potential to be as significant, if not more significant, than the 1988 Bicentenary of European settlement.

We believe that the Anzac Centenary should be placed firmly in its historical context. This anniversary must be seen as part of a continuum of events that established (as far as it went) “the Australian national identity” commencing with the very significant lead-up to and achievement of Federation in 1901 and continuing across the time of the two World Wars in the twentieth century.

Any celebration/commemoration of our military past must recognise the good and the bad and that those components of our national identity and values that can be sourced to our Anzac heritage are framed within a clear understanding that they also come from an inheritance of Empire and its associated colonialism.

Possible Unintended Impact of Anzac Centenary

WfaAR has concerns that, if not thoughtfully managed, four years of “celebrating” Anzac may become a jingoistic, male, white Anglo-Celtic gun-fest where claiming our ‘Britishness’ is about projecting the flag onto a distorted history until it is abused and debased. This type of nationalism was clearly evident in the Cronulla riots. We feel considerable disquiet over this prospect.

As a feminist organisation, WfaAR contends that intense “loyalty to the flag” (with its prominent Union Jack) may become exclusively male. As a republican organisation, WfaAR has concerns that “love of this particular flag” may lead us away from our natural democratic destiny to form a Republic.

All commemorations that form part of this Centenary should be as low-key as

possible, thoughtfully timed, respectful to the entire community and conducted with appropriate solemnity, as they deserve. If this Centenary is to form part of our developing nationalism and national identity in the 21st century, they also deserve this treatment. 2014-2018 should assist the entire community in leading us to the natural development of our nation as a Republic, not in the opposite direction.

WfaAR's view is that generously funded "love the flag" exercises, promoted by the American style patriotism favoured by the Liberal/National Party Coalition (but also adopted by the current Labor Government) and including such activities as those conducted by the National Australia Day Council (also federally funded) may not have their intended purpose. The sentiment is heading in the right direction and certainly well-intentioned but the symbols are totally wrong.

The bottom line here is that such an approach will not begin to form a narrative about our national identity that is inclusive of all the components of the population as would come together to form a Republic, government by "the people". This could well happen before the end of the Anzac Centenary, even if it does not occur before the death of Queen Elizabeth. WfaAR strongly rejects the contention, frequently uttered by our politicians, that the Queen's death is an obvious timing for the commencement of the Australian Republic. We believe the timing of the event should be determined by us, not by events in another country over which we have no control. This position has curious resonance to the critical events of WWI in which Australian military forces participated.

The Centenary and Inclusivity

The Anzac Centenary must include those components of the population that would, on the face of it, appear to be excluded - all of whom will be citizens of the Australian Republic:

- our First Peoples
- a large proportion of the female component of the population
- descendents of Anglo-Celts who have no connection to military service for Australia in any sense
- non Anglo-Celtic migrants who have been here for several generations and whose family members may well have been part of "enemy" forces, especially our Turkish community
- recent immigrants with no connection to the Commonwealth or to European/Asian wars and conflicts.

An exclusive centenary could well defeat its purpose.

Funding

We assume that significant federal funding will be allocated to the Centenary. If so, its value to the country will need to be expressed as its lasting effects and impacts. Short-term commemorative events 2014-2018 will be all well and good but our view is that the centenary should serve as a catalyst for events with a longer term outcome such as the Republic, particularly as significant federal funding as already been spent on extensive military event commemorations since the early 1990s and is allocated to

the Australian War Memorial, Anzac Parade, Anzac Day, Remembrance Day events and the like.

Linkages with Other Events

We believe that the planning for the Anzac Centenary should be framed from the perspective of the years beyond 2018 to properly assess what its lasting impact on national identity and the national psyche should be. We have attached two of our submissions projecting forward to the 2020 Summit (that assumed the Australian republic commenced in 2015) to assist your thinking in this respect.

The 2014-2018 timeframe follows the Centenary of the National Capital in 2013 and may overlap with non-binding votes and referendums on both the Republic - and other matters already committed to by the Gillard Government. All these events should be put into context by the planners.

We note that 2015 is a very significant year in the history of women's peace activism in Australia. It will be the centenary of Australian membership of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) of which Australia was a very early member. Anniversaries such as this one should not be overlooked in the rush to commemorate all things male, all things military and militaristic.

The Gallipoli Centenary and the Republic

If there is one component of the Anzac Centenary that has essential importance to the nation it is the centenary of the Dardanelles campaign and the Allied landings at Gallipoli. Rightly or wrongly, this event will assume an almost sacred reverence and widespread desire to participate in observance in early 2015.

As WfaAR argues in the attached paper, it would be fitting if later that year, Australia became a republic to enshrine the pivotal events and values of our national identity that stem from our military contributions and sacrifices in WW1 and to give them continuing expression into the unending future in our government of all the people. That includes everyone who lives in and loves our land. Such a significant change to our government and our Constitution and how we see ourselves in the world would indeed be a fitting commemoration of the Anzac legacy and the bequeathed values of the Anzacs and their successors.

Our "2015 Republic" paper was first given at a conference of republican groups in Brisbane in November 2006. The version submitted was first revised in 2008 and again for this contribution to the Anzac Centenary.

Yours sincerely

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National Convenor