

The 2015 Republic

**Women for an Australian Republic first presented
Republican Gathering 3 Brisbane November 2006
Revised 2008 and 2010**

In order to produce a strategy for the Australian Republic, we need to firstly describe life in a republic that promises a better and more hopeful future and which will quickly capture the attention of voters. Life in a republic needs to be *inspirational*. The *inspirational Republic* that makes Australia, not a land of wasted opportunity, but a land of idealism and pragmatism, of good-heartedness and good sense, will build on our desire for truly-expressed and practised equality that creates a way of living suited to starting over in the southern hemisphere, far away from the beliefs and conservatism of old Europe.

A survey of our current political, business and spiritual environment reveals a fairly dismal picture. This is well documented in Anna Krawec-Wheaton and Greg Barns' 2006 book, "An Australian Republic" (Note 1). Krawec-Wheaton and Barns' snapshot will be very familiar to most people about contemporary public life in Australia and our sense of togetherness as a nation since 1995:

- Celebrating military events, wars and honouring the dead especially soldiers
- Parochial fixations and attitudes; looking backwards not forwards
- Demonstrating an inability to rise above the carping of vested interest groups to solve problems for the majority
- Focussed on the well faring of individuals: not groups, not joining
- Fewer people sharing the common-wealth
- Excessive focus on individual concerns eg security - instilling fear, not confidence
- Political manipulation of the community psyche/excessive timidity of those wanting change who have no place in the public dialogue; increasing polarity between left and right, wrong and right; good and bad
- Mistrust of politicians and lack of faith in the political process/establishment; perceived lack of honesty in public life; poor quality public representatives.

But also characterised by:

- Increasing concern for the environment and our quality of life (linked principally to prosperity/comfort/lifestyle/costs)
- Increasing desire to participate in and have (some) control over the how we are governed
- Desire for a republic in theory if nothing else.

The model for what kind of republic Australia will be will need to catch the next wave of desire for change (the "national identity" or "wattle model" having failed at

referendum in 1999) will be centred on political renewal of our institutions and government and providing hope to individuals for a safe and satisfying future that offers some control over and greater participation in how they are governed.

Two features continue to be dominant in discussions about the republic:

- One is “when will it start”
- The other is how should we select our head of state.

We have looked at the features of the political environment outlined above to come up with a date: 2015 which is still seven years away and linked to the centenary of Gallipoli, that great “Australian commemorative event” milked as an artform of nationalism by recent federal Governments. It is not a commemoration that will appeal to the majority of women because it is connected with war but it is likely to appeal to women “generally” and, particularly, to women under 30, many of whom make the journey to Turkey along with their male friends and partners.

While Gallipoli *is* indisputably connected with war, we are looking for a date to link to the creation of the Republic that resonates in the Australian psyche and around which we can construct a campaign for the coming Republic

Acknowledging and thanking the 2015 Republicans from Orange, we think they have alighted on a deeply significant and symbolic event, that the republican movement can come together around. The exploitation of Gallipoli for political purposes has only increased in the last 10 years and as Krawec-Wheaton and Barns say in their book, Prime Minister Howard used the Gallipoli stage to articulate his brand of “nationalism as one of courage, egalitarianism and compassion”. If most people in Australia believe that what’s Gallipoli represents today (whether true or not), that dovetails with the intentions of creating a republican form of government in Australia.

There is something more to say about a large-scale commemoration of Gallipoli from the women’s perspective. This anniversary may be problematic for many women who do not like the idea of celebrating war in any way (despite political reinterpretation) or for others of the same inclination and who wouldn’t respond well to the notion of the new Republic being connected to (a) defeat or (b) the slaughter of Australians in the name of the British Empire. Instead, the anniversary will need to be reclaimed – and redefined – in the name of:

- a) courage in the face of adversity
- b) togetherness, the importance of sticking together
- c) never again will Australians die on foreign soil for someone else’s cause: that is, it is a landmark of the expression of our independence
- d) faith that together a nation, we can survive and overcome future challenges.

Having said that about the symbolism of Gallipoli, 2015 will be a significant centenary for Australian women in its own right. This is connected with World War I but also expressed a unique women’s perspective on that conflict. The Sisterhood for International Peace was founded in Melbourne on 25 March 1915, one month before the landings at Gallipoli. This group eventually became the Australian chapter of the Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) from 1919 onwards.

Australian women have been prominent in WILPF from that time. It has active branches in most States and the ACT. Apart from campaigning for universal disarmament and an end to all war, WILPF speaks out on social justice issues (2). Establishing our Republic in 2015 would indeed also provide a worthy commemoration of the contribution of Australian women to the international peace movement.

When we talk to and lobby politicians about the Republic – or anyone else for that matter - we should not be talking about “the republic model” as solely that of selecting a head of state - fascinating though it is - but we should talk about the future of Australia that can be brought about through becoming a Republic.

The *inspirational Republic* is the 2015 Republic and these are its features.

The 2015 Republic will be a platform on which to build the future of Australia. It will:

- break with the past and inspire us for the future (a stepping stone for a new Australia)
- assert the sovereign authority of the Commonwealth of Australia by the will of people
- lessen our cynicism by revitalising our involvement in the political process (starting with the creation of the republic)
- position us well for the changed international environment by creating a new non-colonial identity and allowing that to develop over time
- defend and protect its citizens accountable under the rule of law
- express our love and respect for the land (as we fight for our survival on the driest continent)
- reaffirm our commitment to the values of freedom, equality, cooperation and a fair go for all
- have a new constitution recognising our Indigenous peoples and the equality of women and men before the law
- have our own head of state alternating between women and men.

The slogan for *the 2015 Republic* is very simple:

new constitution, new flag, new start

Essentially, the referendum vote around 2010 to 2012 would be for a new constitution, that is a republican constitution.

The above are suggested as minimal changes upon which greater democracy and democratic technique can be focussed and constructed.

The republican movement needs to be honest and be up front about things like a new flag to would be the symbol of the Republic.

We also need to ensure that our Republic and Republican constitution is regularly reviewed and does not become as outdated as the current one. The operation of the republic and constitution should be reviewed by 2115 at the latest and there should be regular Constitutional Conventions, preferably written into the Constitution itself.

One key thing is to drop our timidity and run a strong, determined and persistent, grassroots campaign. If we say something often enough, no matter how far-fetched it sounds today, eventually it will become a reality, as so many things have done before.

Summary

The model proposed for the Republic is *inspirational*. It draws its inspiration from two events of deep national significance a) the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign in 2015 and looks towards, not a celebration of a long-past war, but draws on the currently understood interpretation of Gallipoli in the Australian community as representing courage, egalitarianism and compassion.

2015 also has particular significance for Australian women in that it celebrates the centenary of the founding of the Sisterhood for International Peace in Melbourne, one month before Anzac. This was the start of the active involvement of Australian women in the international peace movement, women's work that is still important and significant today.

The 2015 Republic sets out principles for the Australian Republic which will be a platform on which to build the future of our country providing for assertion of the people's will; revitalising of our processes of good government; better protection for citizens; expressing our love for the land; committing us to our traditional commonsense values, having a new Constitution and our own head of state.

It will be important for the Republic and the constitution to be regularly reviewed, by 2115 at the latest.

Notes

1. Barns, G and Krawec-Wheaton, A. (2006) *An Australian Republic*. Carlton North Vic, Scribe Books.
2. National Foundation for Australian Women, Australian Women's Archives Project website: www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0184b.htm (accessed 20 March 2008)