

WOMEN for an Australian Republic

www.womenrep.org

Ms Julia Gillard MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

We write about decisions taken by the Government to mark the 60th year of the Queen of Australia's reign. We believe that some of the decisions/actions are unwise and lack insight. They are hindering our search for national identity and do nothing to advance our future as a republic.

WfaAR agrees that we are obliged to observe the Diamond Jubilee of the monarch put in place by our Constitution. We note that our commemoration compares favourably with the breadth and cost of the decisions made in Canada, for example. However, a minimal response to the Diamond Jubilee would have been the most appropriate one given the continual airing of the desire for a Republic in our country and the standing ovation for the Republic at the 2020 Summit in 2008. It would have been quite sufficient to contribute only to the Diamond Jubilee Trust given that the Queen herself visited within the last 12 months. Taking a more clear-sighted worldview: one, for instance, contemplating a greater acceptance of Australia in Asia, the second royal visit in November 2012 should have been rejected.

Of the other commemorative acts, we refer, in particular, to the renaming of the top section of Parkes Place as Queen Elizabeth Terrace. This change removes the name of Henry Parkes, one of Australia's great legislators and "the Father of Federation", from a prominent position and relegates it to the sidelines (to Parkes Place East and West), further reducing the land area of the original Parkes Place while renaming the significant lake vista after a foreign, adopted queen. About this decision, we question why it was necessary and in addition:

- a) What were the essential reasons for the change? What Australian purpose is served in 2012 by naming streets in the Parliamentary Zone after our queens and kings?
- b) Why is one of the best and most significant addresses in the Parliamentary Zone to be named after the current Queen of Australia? What "contribution" is this woman deemed to have made to Australia if this is the criterion for naming streets in the Parliamentary Zone? (see Ms Leon's comments at Senate Estimates, 13-16 February 2012)
- c) Why is it necessary for there to be "physical recognition within the national capital" of the Queen of Australia for this particular anniversary? As a corollary, what is planned for the next one?
- d) Why are Australian names and identities being removed from the Parliamentary Zone? (of all places)

- e) What is the “historical protocol” that is quoted to support the renaming? We would be interested to see the text and date of this document and to understand how and why it was used to implement this particular decision? (We assume that this is a written document? also appears to be referred to as “historical practice”)
- f) What did the consultation process consist of (was any of it public?) and what were the sensitivities identified? (see Senate Estimates transcript)
- g) Was the decision made by a properly convened and correctly attended meeting of the Canberra National Memorials Committee? Please provide details.
- h) Have streets in the Parliamentary Zone already been earmarked to be named, or renamed, after King Charles and King William? If not, why not?

We have reviewed the bamboozling answer provided by your Department to Senator John Faulkner’s question on notice (February 2012 Senate Estimates Q61) about this subject. The reasoning, if it could be called that, can only be described as flimsy; the air of panic in the corridors of 1 National Circuit and Treasury Building almost palpable as the question: “What on earth can we do for the Diamond Jubilee?” resonated around them. This appears to have generated a response but not one that was well thought through.

We have also seen the reply provided by Andrew Smith of the National Capital Authority to the ACT Branch of the Australian Republican Movement that explains, at some length, what was done *but* not why it was done nor why “the problem” was addressed in the way it was. WfaAR does not agree with the chief argument advanced by NCA that a name change was necessary to remove confusion about street names in the Parliamentary Zone. If that were the case, there were other ways to achieve this result; the matter could have been addressed long before this year and/or many other Australian names could have been used. The essential point that WfaAR makes is about the removal of significant Australian identities from their rightful places in the Parliamentary Zone. The fact that they have been replaced by British kings and queens linked to us only through the Constitution is all the more to be lamented.

We note that Queen Victoria Terrace, King George Terrace and King Edward Terrace were all gazetted on 9 October 1952, in less enlightened times. As the present Queen of Australia was already on the British throne at that time, we wonder why Queen Elizabeth Terrace was not also gazetted on that day and, further, why there was a lag of 60 years until this was proposed (beyond both the Silver and Golden Jubilees), the “historical protocol” notwithstanding? It is particularly galling to note that some of our most significant national institutions have the street address of King Edward Terrace. How odd this must look to an international audience when they know that the institutions in question are located in Australia’s planned capital city that came into being only last century!

WfaAR contends that renaming part of Parkes Place as Queen Elizabeth Terrace was uncalled for and does little to advance either our national identity or republicanism. We note that the ALP has support for a republic in its policy platform. We find it hard to believe that a Labor Government with a commitment to Australia’s future as a republic and determined to cement our place in Asia could have seen its way to making a decision *so heavily symbolic* in such a clumsy fashion, obliterating Australian history along the way, in the national capital designed to celebrate Australian achievements as well as to be a physical expression of our democracy. WfaAR regrets that in this and other recent (policy) matters, the Government has missed obvious opportunities to promote Australian nationalism, identity and the Republic.

We do not agree that this is a minor change of little importance and consequence. This street is one of the most important in the national capital fronting the location chosen by the Griffins for Parliament House. Despite the change of location for federal Parliament, it remains so. WfaAR cautions against any view that this is such a small and relatively costless action in the overall scheme of things that no one will really notice, much less care about it. What seems minor from London or Canberra can loom large in Australia as a whole. The long-term costs of implementing out-of-date symbolism, thereby impeding our advance to a republic, may yet be realised.

We note that names such as London Circuit, Edinburgh Avenue and Kings Avenue (gazetted in 1928 replacing Federal Avenue) also do not appear on the Griffin plans. If the Federal Government is intent on renaming Canberra streets, it would do well to turn its attention to these and other inappropriate names such as Empire Circuit even if they are now on Territory land. (In addition, WfaAR is concerned that the ACT Government's Memorials policy allows for street names on Territory land to be named after members of the "ACT community", for example, Clarrie Hermes Drive. This parochial approach is hardly fitting for the national capital. Canberra is just not any old Australian inland town. For national capital residents, the name of your suburb and street has significance and is a matter of pride shared with the whole country.)

The Centenary of Canberra next year is important and relevant to all citizens. The Australian Government's modest contribution to this anniversary and lack of enthusiasm for its own capital, both physically and financially, has it just about "missing in action". Its attitude to Canberra's 100th anniversary compares poorly to the hoopla about both the Diamond Jubilee and the Centenary of Anzac. It doesn't say much for the Government's capacity to imagine and provide leadership for the future especially when a recent poll shows that Australians place low value on and have little regard for their democracy.

WfaAR points out that the Government appears to be ambivalent in its understanding of Australian identity in promoting our links to Asia and has become confused between policy objectives, planning for the future and unquestioning deference to and reverence for our monarch that is misplaced and, ultimately, leading nowhere. This is a shame, most of all for the people of this country who are deserving of the Government's guidance, if not leadership, in these matters.

A copy of this letter has also been sent to the Ministers for Finance and Deregulation; Foreign Affairs and Trade and Regional Australia, to the Leader of the Opposition and to the ACT Chief Minister.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Brasch
National Convenor
24 October 2012