

Letter to The Canberra Times, published 2 June 2017

An edited version of this text in reply to the Australian Monarchist League (see below) appeared in the online and print editions of the paper.

Dear Editor

It escapes me why Phillip Benwell thinks that the Queen needs to be kept out of "it" when she isn't even in "it" (Letters 30 May). What our current Head of State thinks about reconciliation and the republic or, even, when she dies are irrelevant to Australia becoming a republic. It's our Republic, we will decide when and how. It must be a reconciled Republic to right the exclusions of Federation: no women, no First Peoples were involved.

Republicans have talked of the obvious linkage between reconciliation and the Republic since the publication of historian Mark McKenna's excellent book "This Country, A Reconciled Republic?" in 2004 so it's not recent. The Uluru Statement from last weekend has only upped this particular ante.

The Australian style of republicanism is in the water and takes little to be stirred up eg Tony Abbott's ill-fated knighthoods introduced in 2014. One of Malcolm Turnbull's first deliberate acts as PM was to abolish them. The polls still show well over 50 percent support and that's without trying.

Australia is not "free of England" as the habits of the mother country are deeply embedded in our culture, thinking, white customs and establishment. The most recently named street in the Parliamentary Zone was Queen Elizabeth Terrace. It wasn't given an Australian name or named after an Australian. The symbolism was glaring if not jarring.

Benwell should also examine the adequacy of our hardly changed 1901 Constitution. In it, he will find sections allowing the Commonwealth to make laws based on race and that the Queen of England can disallow laws made by the federal parliament. Although no longer used, that last-mentioned section is still on the books while precedent is being upended everywhere in the current days of politics and history.

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This letter was followed a couple of days later by a letter pointing out, correctly, that Australia was not legally free of the UK until the passing of the Australia Act in 1986 (original version on display in the Federation Gallery at the National Archives of Australia that exhibits the essential documents of the Federation since 1901)

Letter from Australian Monarchist League published in The Canberra Times 30 May 2017

Keep Queen out of it (headline added by The Canberra Times)

There has been talk of linking the calls for recognition by [sic] Indigenous people to a republic, with some saying that we [if] break away and Australia becomes a republic, then we no longer become a subject of England, of the monarchy.

The Australian Monarchist League would like to point out that Australia is totally independent of the United Kingdom and that the Queen, as Queen of Australia, acts only in accordance with the Australian constitution and on the advice of her Australian government.

Republicans often talk about being “free of England”, which is a furphy because we became an independent nation making our own decisions in 1901.

The monarchy has always been supportive of the Indigenous people of Australia as can be seen by their many visits to Aboriginal centres and we would warn republicans not to use the issue of Indigenous recognition to bolster their own failing support among the people.

Phillip Benwell
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