

Women's Vision of Australian Government in 2020 worth being part of!

The Republic, inaugurated in 2015 to commemorate the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign in Turkey and the founding of the Sisterhood for International Peace in Melbourne, has been in place for five years. It started on 1 September 2015, on National Wattle Day, in a symbolic move marked by a new, national public holiday.

The term of the first Head of State, Governor-General Helen Garner, is just about to come to an end. It was stipulated in the new Constitution that the first Head of State of the new Commonwealth would be a woman*. The next Governor-General will be a man, the role alternating as an important statement of equality and inclusion which marks the Republic.

There was great rejoicing about the new Constitution which featured, not only alternating head of state between genders, but also a statement of the equality of women and men before the law and recognition of our Indigenous peoples. Women were enthusiastic supporters of these changes, unique to Australia, that fulfilled the promise of their full involvement in the most visible process of new nation-building attempted since the 1890s. It was a fantastic start for the new Commonwealth and widely welcomed by women's groups.

Women are very active in the next selection campaign for the Head of State. The multi-partisan Republic Commission headed by a woman, and of which half the members are women and Indigenous representatives, is running the publicly funded and legislatively limited selection campaign* for the next Governor-General.

After getting 75 percent of the vote at the Republic Referendum in 2013 to mark the centenary of Canberra, direct election is proving extremely popular, more so after the first vote early in 2015, that ignited frenzied interest among voters over the choice of the successful candidate. Women were enthusiastic participants with extremely high participation and welcomed the chance to vote by internet or post as well as at polling booths up to four weeks before the election date* to keep costs to a minimum and ensure eco-friendly elections.

The competitions for a new national flag and anthem for the Republic have been announced.

The third regular Constitutional Convention will take place this year. It will concentrate on the changes necessary to create a system of regional governments replacing the States, the establishment of people's assemblies, citizen-initiated referendums and deliberative polls on national civic issues. Women and Indigenous people have been notably enthusiastic participants in and innovate thinkers and leaders at all the Conventions held so far.

Delegates to the Constitutional Conventions are elected – one woman, man and Indigenous person from each electorate, along with a panel of experts. Voting for the Conventions is voluntary.

* ideas that can be extended into our general political processes ie alternating gender for the Prime Minister and Chief Justice of the High Court can also be specified in the next Constitution.

Acknowledging:

Catherine Helen Spence, feminist visionary from South Australia (1839-1910)

2015 Republicans, a republican group based in Orange NSW

Women for an Australian Republic

www.womenrep.net.au

April 2008