

Women for an Australian Republic

Our Republic – The Future

25 March 2008

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

Women for an Australian Republic (WfaAR) is a group of women committed to achieving a successful outcome at the next referendum on the republic. We offer support and assistance to the Government which has declared its support for a republic. We would be pleased to meet with you to canvass ideas we have developed for implementing the republic.

Why Women for an Australian Republic exists

Our constituency – representing the interests of both women and our Indigenous peoples in constitutional change - is an important one for the vote on the republic and one not adequately represented by any other republican group. This is the main reason why WfaAR exists - based on our experiences in 1999 when so few women spoke positively in the public debate and the failure of the YES campaign to capture enough of the vote in the States and polling indicated that women's support for a republic was significantly lower than that of men. Polls since indicate that this situation persists up to today.

We consider a future republic - expressed as “government by the people” - will provide the best government for our country. Our group does not see its interests in the republic as confined to “the best model for Head of State” but considers the adoption of *a republican constitution* (particularly embodying the equality of women and men before the law and the recognition of our Indigenous peoples) to be deeply significant in the change to a republican form of government.

Our statement of objectives is at Attachment A. Since 2006, we have adopted the principle of alternating women and men for Head of State as an important part of our platform. We will strongly lobby for this as a true expression of equality and inclusion in the next constitution.

Recent Contributions to the Republican Movement

The hallmark of our activities over the last few years has been the provision of significant strategic leadership to the republican movement. We approach the republic sensibly and seek consensus. Our group gave evidence to the 2004 Senate Inquiry into the Republic covering a range of topics including: how women could be persuaded to vote for the republic; the attractiveness of direct election to women;

what women expect of a republic and women's attitudes to and likely participation in voluntary voting for the Head of State.

WfaAR's submission to the Inquiry was both comprehensive and practical with analysis of those proposals for selecting the Head of State that were likely to appeal to women. Those are characterised by an adequately democratic approach and ones where women are able to participate in both the development of constitutional change and *fully* in its eventual realisation.

From 2005 onwards, WfaAR has actively participated in Republican Gatherings - meetings of republican groups held in August 2005, April 2006 and November 2006, with the next one planned for May 2008. WfaAR was the catalyst, assisted by the Australian Republican Movement, in establishing these conferences aimed at getting a meeting of minds between republican groups and developing some form of agreement about the next steps - a slow but necessary process. After nearly three years, some progress is now evident and the remaining differences of opinion between groups can be clearly identified.

Our group has suggestions to make about preparing for the republic ahead of either a plebiscite or a referendum and, *unlike some groups, is prepared to take a stand on the various popular models for selecting the Head of State and about the principles that should support a republican form of government.* WfaAR strongly supports the people choosing the method for selecting the Head of State at either plebiscite or referendum.

The 2004 Senate Inquiry led to increased awareness of the full breadth of implementation issues, particularly those affecting the States. We are pleased to say that it also led to more informed debate among the various groups and created a climate which enabled them to come together to pursue the common goal. Attached for your information is our latest conceptual paper developed by a number of women who support a republic - "The 2015 Republic". This paper was presented to the most recent Republican Gathering held in Brisbane in late 2006. It has been slightly amended to bring it up to date.

How Women for an Australian Republic operates

WfaAR has operated on the internet with a regularly updated website focussed on information and education since early 1999. We do not accept funding from external sources. Links are provided on our website to anti-republic sites as well as to supporting sites in order to provide a balanced view of the debate for users. By using the net as our main form of communication, we particularly aim provide a source of information for *young women* and for women in rural and regional areas who have access to the internet.

WfaAR is advised by a group of women lawyers, academics and advocates for women's increased participation in public life around the country. One of our advisers, Professor Kim Rubenstein, now of the ANU School of Law, also gave evidence to the Senate Inquiry about women and the republic.

Request for Information Prior to Meeting

It would be helpful to have some information about the Government's current approach to the republic and the amount of effort currently being applied to developing plans for its implementation, to help us prepare before meeting you:

- Which Minister and which Department is responsible for development of policy and plans for the plebiscite or referendum and for the republic generally?
- How many staff and how much money are currently being applied on these tasks (current and projected FTE and funding over the next four years starting in 2007-08)?
- Is the Government intending to respond to the 2004 Senate Inquiry into the Republic; if not, what use does it intend to make of the report and recommendations?
- What is the Government's priority attaching to and proposed timetable for either a plebiscite or a referendum on the republic, or both?
- How does the Government intend to involve republican groups in its campaign for a republic?

It would also be helpful if you could nominate a contact in the public service (preferably the responsible Branch Head), to whom we may direct enquiries from time to time.

A copy of this letter has been sent to the Deputy Prime Minister and to the Ministers for Health and Ageing, and Housing and to Parliamentary Secretary McKew.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Brasch
National Convenor