

*Women for an Australian Republic*  
*Supported a YES vote at the 1999 Referendum*

30 January 2008

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

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing to you about the appointment of the next Governor-General.

Women for an Australian Republic (WfaAR) is pleased to make some suggestions about the appointment process for your consideration. Our intention in making these suggestions is to allow you to open up the selection - in whatever way you choose - to produce a more limited or more expanded process.

We know that the Governor-General appointment (as well as that of the next Chief Justice of the High Court also due by August this year) is highly symbolic. It will be an early indication of your Government's intentions towards advancing issues like the Republic and constitutional change. We believe that your consideration of this matter requires attention *in the very near future* as there is not much time between now and the announcement of Major-General Jeffery's replacement.

The selection process for the Governor-General does not require any changes to the Constitution or legislation because it is based on precedent and practice. This means changes will be relatively easy to implement especially as you can decide, personally, what they should be.

Even minimal changes to the selection process will send strong signals, both domestically and internationally, about your leadership of the new Government, your intentions to modernise the governance of our country and your desire for change.

Importantly, WfaAR makes the point at the outset that we consider it deeply significant that the next person appointed to the Governor-General's job be a woman. There have been no females appointed as the Head of State's representative in Australia since Federation. From the standpoint of 2008, this is an astonishing oversight on the part of your predecessors and compares unfavourably with both Canada and New Zealand. We fail to see that this has anything to do with a shortage of excellent woman candidates and everything to do with our country's deep-seated comfort with a dominant male culture, in both style and substance.

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Rather than being directive about the changes that should be made to the Governor-General selection process, we suggest the following possible approaches to achieve an expanded and more open appointment:

- ? A public nomination process (probably restricted given the time available to conduct it).
- ? Inviting the leaders of State and Territory Governments to make nominations, concentrating particularly on women and Indigenous nominees.
- ? Appointing a small committee to advise you on possible candidates, a shortlist and on the final nomination.
- ? Discussing your choice with the Leader of the Opposition before you make the announcement, with the final name possibly jointly agreed.
- ? Leading discussion in Parliament on the short-list of nominees or the single final nominee before or after the announcement (noting that the Queensland Parliament discussed Governor Bryce's appointment after it had been agreed by the Queen).
- ? Making the shortlist of nominees public at an appropriate stage in the process.

We agree that a possibly expanded selection process this year, however limited, could bear similarities to the one proposed for Head of State at the 1999 referendum on the republic (public nomination process; ratification by Leader of Opposition and endorsed by two-thirds of Parliament). Our intention in making these suggestions, however, is not to seek to indicate our support for the 1999 selection model but to point out that the process can be expanded to act as a transition between the secretive Governor-General selection process in place up to 2008 and the more significant selection process for our own Head of State, that will be decided by all voters at referendum in the not too far distant future.

WfaAR would be pleased to provide you, or your Department, with any assistance needed to promote a more open selection process for the next Governor-General and to consider women candidates for the job.

A copy of this letter has been sent to the Governor-General and to the Attorney-General.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Brasch  
National Convenor

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