



Australian Republican Movement

Ten Critical Questions in the Republic Campaign

1. Why should there be another republican referendum?

The public want a second referendum. A Newspoll published in the Australian on 15 November 2002 reported that a majority – 54% – want a referendum within five years. A further 23% supported a referendum in 5-10 years.

A Newspoll / Sunday Telegraph poll on 6 January 2004 found that 57% of those polled would like a new referendum to decide whether or not Australia should become a republic to happen in 2004.

Both sides in 1999 said there should be; it was voters' expectation. The NO case "vote no to this republic" slogan means that it is dishonest of them not to give the Australian people another referendum.

2. Why don't republicans just accept that they lost in 1999 and give up and go away?

That's not how democracy works! Federation had its ups and downs in the 1890s. More recently taxation reform needed fifteen years and three attempts before it was successful.

3. Don't we already have an Australian Head of State in the person of the Governor-General?

No. The GG is the Queen's Representative in Australia: the Queen is our Head of State.

4. Why doesn't the ARM just choose a model and get on with selling it to the Australian people?

It is more democratic to allow the Australian people to choose via a plebiscite. The plebiscite process will give the legitimacy that is necessary for the referendum to pass. That is, it might just convince most republicans to vote for the preferred model on the grounds that there has been sufficient public discussion of the alternatives.

5. If a republic is inevitable why not just wait for it to happen painlessly and without effort?

An Australian republic is achievable but not inevitable. Nothing in politics or life is inevitable. Strike out the word inevitable. The republic has to be worked for. That is what the ARM is doing. The idea of inevitability has not served republicans well: it is just a get out clause for lukewarm republicans and a device for monarchists to hide behind.

6. Why not wait for the death of the Queen, the anniversary of Gallipoli, or some other "trigger"?

No. This will prevent necessary community debate prior to the decision. Our opponents will criticise any attempt to link the republic to a timetable, as they did in 1999. It is also another excuse for lethargy.

7. Why not just wait for a spontaneous republic in the absence of a groundswell?

This just won't happen. It is a version of the 'inevitability' argument. Democracy doesn't work that way. Public opinion has to be informed and the community has to be engaged in debate. That's how a successful campaign operates. We have no reason to be apologetic. We already have majority opinion on our side. We have to ensure that parliamentarians know that.

8. Will any republican model do?

No. But any responsible and popularly endorsed model will do. This may involve codification of the powers of the president and certainly involves careful consideration of the details.

9. Why not go straight to a referendum and forget the plebiscites? Isn't the plebiscite just a trick?

No. A plebiscite is not a trick. It is a democratic mechanism to ensure that the people get to choose. It is a way for the community to say to the parliament that we want them to treat this issue of a republic seriously. It is a threshold question. It can be used with other democratic mechanisms such as a constitutional convention.

10. Isn't constitutional reform too expensive? What about the cost?

Democracy is sometimes necessarily expensive. There are many other constitutional reform proposals, such as Senate Reform or Reconciliation, on the table. All nations sometimes change their constitutions and Australia does it by constitutional referendum. Nevertheless the ARM must consider all reasonable opportunities to moderate costs. This will in the future involve consideration of issues such as electronic voting and holding plebiscites and referendums concurrently with federal elections.