



# Australian Senate Occasional Lecture Series

## Does our Constitution really give effect to the doctrines it purportedly embodies? An argument in favour of constitutional reform

→ Dr Bede Harris

---

Friday 24 June, 12.15pm to 1.15pm • Main Committee Room, Parliament House

---



Dr Bede Harris

The difficulty of amending the Australian Constitution has had the consequence that debate on systemic constitutional reform is virtually non-existent. Yet our constitutional arrangements manifest significant flaws:

- the Constitution embodies representative democracy, yet our electoral system is grossly unfair;
- the Constitution also embodies responsible government, yet Parliament has few tools available to it to enforce ministerial responsibility; and
- Australia is signatory to international human rights conventions, yet the Constitution protects only a handful of rights.

Despite this, nothing changes. In a context of poor civics education and voter disenchantment, Dr Harris asks, would not a Constitution that embodied a truly representative electoral system, effective mechanisms for legislative oversight of the executive and effective protection for the full range of human rights be more likely to create an environment in which citizens were fully engaged in the processes of government?

**Dr Bede Harris** has taught constitutional law in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in Law at Charles Sturt University. He has published numerous articles in the area of public law, in particular on freedom of expression, legal dualism and the recognition of Indigenous law. His most recent books are *Freedom, Democracy and Accountability – A Vision for a New Australian Constitution* (2012) and *Exploring the Frozen Continent: What Australians Think of Constitutional Reform* (2014).

---

**Admission free** – bookings not required. Can't make the lecture? Watch it live at [www.aph.gov.au/Senate/Lectures](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/Lectures)  
Enquiries: Senate Procedure Office, telephone 02 6277 3074 or email [research.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:research.sen@aph.gov.au)