

Reform of the Australian Federation

To the Select Committee on the Reform of the Australian Federation

I wish to submit the following.

- (i) The distribution of constitutional and responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the States (including territories).

Through the last 40 years I have observed more and more political power being centralized in Canberra. Australia is a vast continent with radically different conditions and needs in its far-flung places “one size fits all” is not appropriate. It should be borne in mind that our constitution is a grant of limited powers from the States to the Commonwealth.

Retain the Constitutional Monarchy in the Commonwealth Constitution and restore the Crown in the Courts and legislation in those States in which it has been removed. Retain the Crown as the authority to handle land titles. Strengthen and maintain the division of powers between Federal, State and Local governments. It is important to have this division of power between the three levels of government. The greatest political problem with modern governments is the tendency to concentrate power at the centre. Without wanting to criticize any political group, just consider the number of warnings given to the relevant department about fires caused by the recent insulation program.

I suggest the following division of powers (a basic list only)

Federal: - Defense, foreign policy, trade (tariffs), quarantine, immigration, communications.

State: - Education, justice, transport, health. Income tax.

Local;- Town planning, roads, weights and measures, health regulations, sanitation services.

- (ii) Financial relations between Federal, State and Local government.

The practice of all taxation going to Canberra should cease. The States collected income tax prior to WW2. That power was ceded to Canberra allegedly to help the war effort with the promise that it would be restored at war’s end. The GST was promised as a State tax. That agreement is now broken. All political wisdom does not reside in Canberra. In keeping with my suggestion in (i) taxes should be shared between the three levels of government in a manner commensurate with their different responsibilities.

- (iii) Possible constitutional amendment, including the recognition of local government.

Local government is strictly a state responsibility. In Victoria local government grew out of “Roads Boards”, they were local people co-operating to build their own roads. There is no need to have local government mentioned in the constitution. It would be a definite disadvantage as it would then give Canberra more control over local government and hasten the concentration of power at the centre.

(iv) Processes, including the Council of Australian governments, and the referral of powers and procedures for enhancing cooperation between the various levels of Australian government.

COAG would be unnecessary with a proper and equitable division of powers.

(iv) Strategies for strengthening Australia's regions and the delivery of services through regional development committees and regional grant programs.

Australia's regions should be catered for by Local and State governments. Regional development committees and regional grant programs are creatures of centralized government. Amalgamated municipalities have not been a success. The promised "economies of scale" have not given any relief from the compounding rate increases. Residents are expressing more and more dissatisfaction with their councils. My area was represented by 36 councilors now we only have 9 councilors. I recommend splitting up the areas to the previous boundaries.

D.J. Auchterlonie