

Chapter 6

The committee's conclusions

6.1 The Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill 2008 inquiry received 249 submissions from a wide range of involved stakeholders and private citizens reflecting both the level and scope of public interest in the issues surrounding Australia's constitutional arrangements and reform including an Australian republic.

6.2 The committee appreciates that the question of an Australian republic is one in which there is a wide range of views and well-established positions on both sides of the debate. However, the one issue on which there was consensus amongst witnesses regardless of their views on a republic and of the bill in question was that there is a need for greater public education and awareness in relation to Australia's constitutional system.

6.3 In light of the evidence before it, the committee recognises the importance of improving the understanding of Australia's constitutional arrangements. The committee takes the view that such awareness would, in turn, enable greater community engagement and provide for a more informed public debate about any future constitutional reform including a republic. The committee maintains therefore, that if Australians are to be active participants in making decisions about the future of the country, they need to be fully informed about the current constitutional context in order to understand the ramifications of any proposed reform including steps towards a republic.

6.4 The committee has noted the recommendations of the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee in relation to public education and awareness raising and specifically its first recommendation. The committee is also of the view that programs should be established to provide for general constitutional education and awareness.¹

Recommendation 1

6.5 The committee recommends the establishment of an ongoing public awareness campaign on Australia's constitutional system which engages as wide a range of the public as possible.

6.6 In response to evidence highlighting the importance of Australians being consulted and involved in any process leading towards a future Australian republic, (including the view that there was inadequate public ownership in relation to the 1999 referendum), the committee recommends that any such future process engage Australians to the fullest extent possible.

1 Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, *The road to a republic*, August 2004, Recommendation 1, p. 134.

Recommendation 2

6.7 The committee recommends that if any further process advocating constitutional change is undertaken, including that of a republic, it seek to encourage Australians to engage meaningfully in the debate.

Senator Helen Polley

Chair