



Embargo: 7.30 p.m. Wednesday
24th May, 1967.

REFERENDUM: THE "YES" CASE

Talk by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

(This is the final radio and television talk by the Prime Minister in support of the "Yes" cases for both referendums. It will be programmed by the A.B.C. in all states this evening.)

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You are being asked, on May 27th, to approve two measures passed by the National Parliament to alter the Constitution. That is why the Leaders of the three main parties represented in Federal Parliament are asking you to say "Yes" to both questions.

First, we ask you to say "Yes" to the proposed law "to alter the Constitution so that the number of Members of the house of Representatives may be increased without necessarily increasing the number of Senators".

Secondly, we ask you to say "Yes" to the proposed law to alter the Constitution insofar as it affects our aboriginal population.

As to this second question, there was no dispute nor argument in the Federal Parliament. It was adopted unanimously in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The alteration is designed to remove from the Constitution certain words which appear to discriminate against Aborigines and to provide that Aborigines are to be counted in reckoning the population. Just as the Parliament was unanimous, we expect that you will wish to vote "Yes" to this proposal.

As to the first question, a case for "Yes" and a case for "No" has been sent to all electors. I hope that after reading these cases the issues raised are clear in your minds and you appreciate the strength of the case for a "Yes" vote.

Some may still be puzzled about what is called the nexus between the House of Representatives and the Senate. It is, in fact, a provision in our Constitution which says that the House of Representatives cannot be enlarged without at the same time increasing the number of Senators on a basis of one more Senator for each two added to the House of Representatives.

If you say "Yes" to the law passed by both Houses of the Federal Parliament, it will be possible to look at membership of the House of Representatives and membership of the Senate as two separate matters. It will be possible, when thought necessary, to enlarge the popular House; it will be possible, when thought necessary, to enlarge the Senate. But we won't be compelled, as we now are, to increase the membership of both the Senate and the popular House at the same time.

That's what the nexus referendum amounts to in simple terms.

But, as well as breaking the nexus, the new law we have passed in Parliament would write into the Constitution - for the first time - a provision clearly restricting the rate at which the House of Representatives can grow. It will be tied to population

growth and tied to a figure of population represented by each Federal Member nearly twenty thousand greater than he represented on average when the present size of the Parliament was fixed in 1949.

You should understand also that every member of the House of Representatives voted for the proposed change, and in the Senate the voting for the alteration was forty-five to seven.

The authors of the "No" case tell you that Parliament's proposal would weaken the position and authority of the Senate. This argument will not stand up. The Senate of sixty members is made up of ten from each of the six States. The powers and role of the Senate are defined in the Constitution, and nothing in our proposal would change these powers. We believe that at the moment sixty Senators can adequately discharge their responsibilities as members of a House of Review and as a States' House. I might point out that, although the Senators are elected from the individual States and members of the House of Representatives from individual electorates, all members of the National Parliament (whether Senators or MP's) come from the States. They are all in a very real sense State men and women in a Federal Parliament.

You would imagine from the "No" case that while Senators retain their State identity all the members of the popular House suddenly, upon election, cease to have any identity at all with the States they come from. This is nonsense!

The authors of the "No" case don't argue the practical and common sense proposition that the link between the Senate and the popular House is clumsy, and that it makes for more, not fewer, parliamentarians. They say, in effect, "If we can't have more Senators, we'll rubbish the House of Representatives and say they are an incompetent lot anyway". This is childish.

The House of Representatives, the House in which governments are made, is constructed upon electorates and electorates are constructed on population. They change as the population changes. They should grow in a reasonable way as the population grows. From time to time, since Federation, when the population was small, the popular House has been enlarged. By the time the next election comes round, it will have been twenty years since the size of the House of Representatives was last reviewed, and the population will have grown by fifty per cent - from eight to twelve millions over that period. The time has come for another look at the numbers required in the House to make it truly representative of a growing population - a population conscious of the changes and developments occurring in our continent. If there is to be any increase, a "Yes" vote from you, because of the safeguard it incorporates, will ensure that any increase must be modest.

The oddest feature of the "No" case is that while its authors protest that we have enough parliamentarians, a "No" vote would perpetrate an out-dated system whereby if we wanted twelve more parliamentarians we would be compelled to have eighteen more, and if, just by way of illustration, we wanted twenty-four more we would be compelled to have thirty-six. There is an Alice in Wonderland kind of logic about this idea; yet, when you strip away all the fancy talk, the authors of the "No" case are not really arguing for fewer parliamentarians. They are the champions of a stay-put situation guaranteeing more parliamentarians every time only a few are needed.

We, on the other hand, are asking you to vote "Yes" as a mature democracy looking sensibly at a practical parliamentary reform. It is neither sensible nor practical to keep the Senate and the House tied together like Siamese twins.

CANBERRA. 24 MAY, 1967.