



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

4 MAY 1977

REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN OPENING

On May 21 we will all have an opportunity for a say in our own future.

Four questions will be put to all of us, affecting the Constitution. As you know, it is the Constitution that sets the guidelines for the way Governments operate in Australia.

The questions that are being put to us all are, in our view, fair, sensible and just. They will make the Constitution work better.

In the past, people have had a tendency to vote No when Constitutional questions and referendums have been put. In the past there may have been good reason for this. It has often been a case of Federal politicians asking for more power for themselves. People are a little suspicious of politicians who ask for more power. People tend to think that politicians have enough power.

But the questions being put on May 21 are quite unlike that. Nobody is asking for more power for themselves. Nobody is asking for more power for Canberra. The questions do not take anything away from the States. That is important, because the States have a vital and continuing role to play in our system of Government.

The questions being put are fair. They are sensible and they are just. They will make the Constitution work better. There are other differences from what has happened in the past. There was a Constitutional Convention at which representatives of the Federal Government, State Governments and local government discussed these matters in great detail. The principles lying behind the questions gained great support at that Constitutional Convention. We have all political parties in the Federal sphere supporting these questions. I believe they are going to be successful because they are fair, they are just, they are reasonable, and they will make the Constitution work better.

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Let us look at the proposals. The first proposal concerns simultaneous elections for the House of Representatives and for the Senate. Surely this is simple common sense, because otherwise we could have four elections over the next four years.

A Yes vote cannot reduce the powers of the Senate or of the States, but what it does mean is that when you go to vote in the Federal area you will be voting for the Government of Australia.

The second proposal concerns the Senator you actually elect. Should he die or resign during his period of office, we believe that he ought to be replaced by somebody from the same political party and that the replacement Senator should serve out the remainder of this term. That means that the party balance determined at one election will be maintained until the next.

The third question concerns the right of voters in the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory to vote at referendums. At the moment they are denied that right. We believe it is only fair and proper that they should be able to vote as can other Australians. 150,000 people are involved. We ask you to give them that right.

The fourth question concerns the retiring age for Federal judges to be appointed in the future. We believe that after the age of 70 it is only fair and reasonable that responsibility should be handed on to younger people, and this is especially important with the new development of a Federal system of Family Courts. A Yes vote will make this possible.

The four proposals then are these: simultaneous elections to be held for the Senate and the House of Representatives: casual Senate vacancies to be filled by a person of the same political party as the Senator chosen by the people: electors in the Territories to be allowed to vote at referendums to alter the Constitution: and retiring ages to be set for High Court judges and judges of other Federal Courts.

We recommend a Yes vote on all questions. They are fair, they are reasonable, they are just, and they will make the Constitution work better. They are supported by all Federal political parties. They represent plain Australian common sense. They give us a real opportunity to reform the Constitution.
