



**PRIME MINISTER**

51/95

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP**

**AUSTRALIAN REPUBLIC**

(embargo: 7.30pm 7 June 1995)

It is the view of the Government that Australia's head of state should be an Australian - and that Australia should be a republic by the year 2001.

I announced in the Parliament today the Government's approach to achieving the transition to an Australian republic. The proposals involve minimal change to Australia's system of government and institutions.

This is the final step to becoming a fully independent nation. It will permit the full and unambiguous expression of Australia's national identity.

The Government is releasing its proposals as a focus for further public discussion and debate. All Australians should participate in this important national debate.

The Government's package is outlined in the Attachment. The main features are:

- the Commonwealth Parliament would appoint an Australian head of state by a two-thirds majority vote in a joint sitting of the Senate and the House of Representatives - a process designed to ensure that the office of head of state is not politicised;
- serving Federal, State and Territory politicians would not be eligible for nomination until at least 5 years after their departure from Parliament;
- all the powers possessed by the Governor-General would be held by an Australian head of state, including the so-called "reserve powers"; and
- the States should be free to determine their own constitutional arrangements. However, the Government is confident that the Australian people will decide against the constitutional anomaly of monarchical States existing within a republican Commonwealth.

The proposals can only be introduced by referendum. Under the Constitution, the changes will require the support of a majority of Australian voters and a majority of voters in a majority of the States.

The Government proposes to hold a referendum in 1998 or 1999. If the people agree, the changes would come into effect no later than the centenary of Australia's Federation in 2001.

Our course is simple and, we believe, irresistible - as simple and irresistible as the idea of a Commonwealth of Australia was to the Australians of the 1890s.

Our goal now echoes that founding sentiment of a century ago. It flows from the fact that we are all Australians. We share a continent. We share a past, present and a future. And our head of state should be one of us.

**CANBERRA**  
**7 June 1995**

**AUSTRALIAN REPUBLIC - GOVERNMENT PACKAGE**

"Commonwealth of Australia" would be retained as the title of an Australian republic, and "President of the Commonwealth of Australia" would be adopted as the title of an Australian head of state.

The President would be appointed for a non-renewable term of office of five years by a two-thirds majority vote in a joint sitting of the Commonwealth Parliament, following the nomination of a single individual by the Prime Minister. The requirement for a two-thirds majority of a joint sitting will mean effectively that there will need to be prior bi-partisan agreement to the nominee.

The President would be an Australian citizen of voting age and may not hold any other remunerated position while in office.

Serving Commonwealth, State and Territory parliamentarians would be excluded from nomination as President, and former Commonwealth, State and Territory parliamentarians would be excluded from nomination until five years have passed since their departure from parliament.

The Commonwealth Parliament would nominate, by a two-thirds majority vote in a joint sitting, the office holder(s) entitled to temporarily perform the duties of President should circumstance or need arise.

The Government supports the appointment of State Governors to act as President when needed, with those eligible being from States no longer using The Queen to appoint their Governors. If no State Governor from a republican State is available, the President of the Senate should act.

The President would have the right to resign. His or her resignation would be passed to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, who would convey it to the Parliament. The resignation of a President would be self-executing, with the Constitution to provide for an acting President to assume office upon the resignation of the President.

The President would be subject to removal by a two-thirds majority vote in a joint sitting of the Commonwealth Parliament, with either House to have the right to initiate the joint sitting by passing a motion supported by a simple majority of its members. However, the President's removal would not be contingent on a specified set of facts, circumstances or conditions.

The President would perform the ceremonial and representational functions currently performed by the Queen and Governor-General.

The President would exercise the powers currently exercised by the Governor-General under Commonwealth legislation, on the advice of the Federal Executive Council.

The President would exercise all the constitutional powers currently vested in the Governor-General and, except in relation to the reserve powers, be expressly required to act in accordance with Ministerial advice.

The reserve powers currently possessed by the Governor-General would remain with the President, and the Constitution would provide that the constitutional conventions governing the exercise of these powers would continue, but the conventions would not be spelt out. The manner of exercise by the President of the reserve powers would not be open to challenge in the courts.

All references in the Constitution to the Queen, the Crown and the Governor-General would be removed.

The States would be free to decide their own State constitutional arrangements.

Australia would remain a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Currently, 29 of the 51 member countries of the Commonwealth are republics.

Copies of the Prime Minister's speech are available from the Prime Minister's Press Office, telephone (06) 277 7744.