

This 'Ideas Piece' was originally one chapter of 'A Blueprint to Advance Australia Collectively' originally written in 1999 to 2000 and released publicly in January 2001. It has not been adapted or updated from the original. The 'Ideas Piece' format is designed to help generate discussion around areas of social interest.

An Australian Republic

I'd like to point out that I favor Australia becoming a republic, so bear that in mind whilst you read this concept.

Leadership is about getting people passionate about saying 'YES' and then guiding them through to a positive result.

Any fool can lead a negative argument particularly without offering alternatives other than the 'status quo'. It requires minimal skill and the only guideline that has to be followed is to keep tapping into the cautious human nature innate in all of us.

The recent republic debate was defeated on 2 fronts.

The first front was the one fought out on the battlefield of suspicion and cautiousness, the front known as 'perception'.

The ARM was soundly defeated. Its job was to assure and guide the Australian public (the majority of whom yearned to say YES) into accepting the desirable. But they chose to play their own music and ignored the overwhelming public sentiment that distrusted the quasi political model for a choice of their own. They also ran a poor argument - they fought the campaign under a broader banner of 'inevitability'.

Saying something is 'inevitable' and thereby insisting we accept the result sooner rather than later, is like asking someone to accept death now, because it is after all, 'inevitable'. People have a tendency to fight to survive.

That played into the hands of the backward thinking 'NO' campaign. All they had to do (and did) was tap into the cautiousness and suspicion of the public to win. Guess what? They did.

The second front was the front fought on the battlefield of 'public desire'. With a negative argument tapping into public perception of 'too much' the public desire was one of needing a sense of 'control' in an attempt to reassure them that their positive choice was right. A mature, independent country proud to be Australian.

Instead, the ARM tried to force through their own version of a model and, even if it IS a better choice, the ARM ignored the FACT that you can only eat a T-Bone steak, one bite at a time. The public was being force fed and was not delighted with the meal.

The Republican movement also got trapped into thinking that our model had to have the appearance of similar models from overseas. It has been the same problem with our taxation system. Instead of

designing something unique and representative of who we are as a country, we have copied our model from overseas styles, tinkering with a few changes here or there, making few substantial improvements.

Again the winner here was the negative team who trotted out a simple message along the lines of ‘Why replace one figure head that we know works, with another one that we are suspicious of?’

The negative thinkers focused on the single head of state model being proposed by the ARM as similar to the Unites States model, and all of the implications of power and control that model appeared to represent.

(That in itself is a big clue to the solution and I’ll come back to that in a moment.)

Never mind the realities of what was being proposed by the ARM. The perception of what the public thought they were going to end up with was a U.S styled president.

In effect what occurred was that the ARM was forced to battle not so much with the ‘NO’ group, but with their OWN supporters. The general public wanted to say yes but was not going to support the model their ‘leaders’ presented for a choice. It is far too difficult to win anything when your own supporters are against you.

So what could have been presented as an alternative?

I believe that an initial component of creating a model that the public would embrace and that would fit more in line with the model proposed by the ARM, is to step back and assess what it was the people of Australia were *really* saying.

Their rejection of the ‘YES’ model was based on their distrust of politicians that had been heightened distinctly at the time the constitutional vote occurred. This increased distrust of our elected representatives made a NO vote more likely when the model being proposed required a 2/3rds majority of parliament.

*“In other words, politicians we don’t trust are going to be given the right to pick OUR president - **No chance** mister”.*

Even though the ARM model did not provide rights of ‘veto’ for the president (an argument falsely claimed by the ‘NO’ side) the level of public distrust was just high enough to suspect otherwise. As an interesting side line, in the past 6 months our level of distrust has increased significantly and if a vote was held now for a president WITH ‘veto’ powers, it would probably succeed.

So as an alternative, why couldn’t we combine aspects of the ARM model adjusted to address the underlying aspects that the public was really concerned about.

That concern was with the issue of power and control. That issue was with putting the perceived control of our country into the hands of just one person. The public perception counts even if the ARM effectively ignored it, despite the safety valve of a 2/3rds majority of parliament.

So to overcome that perception problem, let me ask why we need to have just one head of state? We've had Governors General since day one. They seem to be apolitical enough, represent the state fairly well and haven't sacked anyone we elected.

So why do we need just ONE president? Why not have a presidential cell? Each state or territory gets their own state president that represents the country at any official duty held in that state or territory. This collective handles all of the duties normally undertaken by the Governor General/President.

This sharing of responsibility addresses the Australian public's suspicion of a singular figurehead with control over the country. The perception *does* matter.

Election option 1 - Parliament Selects

1. We want to remove as much of the perception of political bias as we can. As such, any person who has been elected to Federal or State parliament would be ineligible as would anyone who has stood for election under the banner of a political party.
2. We'd also want to ensure that they have no criminal history or have been declared bankrupt at any stage.
3. Current Australian citizen and listed on the electoral role.
4. Mentally competent.
5. Aged 18 or over
6. Each member of the presidential cell would be elected by a 2/3rds majority of each state's respective parliament.

Election option 2 - The Presidential Draw

What about if we did something truly Australian, where we tapped into the ethos of everyone having a fair go, and an even chance? How could we address the issue that option 1 leaves open, that being - manipulation by those with the best media campaign and funds raising their profiles to a level that helps ensure their success?

The conditions 1- 5 apply as above

6. The name of every person who meets the criteria 1-5 above is placed in a computer that selects at random, a person to take on the presidential duties in their home state or territory for a period of 2 years. Leading up to the 'draw' people could elect to NOT being available for the position and their name would be removed from the list.

A Presidential 'raffle'. Can you get any more Australian than that?