



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**CONSTITUTION ALTERATION
(ESTABLISHMENT OF
REPUBLIC) BILL 1999**

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Monday, 9 August 1999

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 9 August 1999
Page 8147
Questioner
Speaker Abbott, Tony MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Employment Services) (8.53 pm)—I rise briefly to congratulate the Prime Minister, the cabinet and the government on the proposed wording of the question to go to the people on 6 November. In light of the comments earlier of the Leader of the Opposition, without betraying the confidence of the party room, I should point out that Bob Charles, the chairman of that bipartisan committee, said very clearly that, in the light of the discussion, he supported the position that the government had taken, and there was no coalition member of that committee who dissented from that in the party room.

As anyone who has followed this debate knows, I support the existing Australian Constitution, including the Crown, not because I think it is perfect but because I think it is better than all the alternatives. It is my strong view that a system which has stood the test of time, which has served Australia well through all the challenges of the century, is worthy of respect. Certainly it deserves to be given the benefit of the doubt. Republicans have placed this issue on the national agenda and therefore this debate is the debate we had to have, and 6 November is the vote we have to have to resolve this issue, if not for all time then certainly for our time.

I will be voting no on 6 November, but obviously this is going to be a vote unlike almost any other. Many people will be voting no for many different reasons: some because they support the existing system, including the Crown; some because they see no alternative which is preferable to the existing system; and some, such as the member for Calare, because they see a better alternative to that which is on offer on 6 November. Some people will be voting yes for very different reasons: some because they support the alternative on offer; some because they would support any alternative to the existing system; and some because they fear an even worse alternative. But it is absolutely vital that this issue be put to the people, and that is why both republicans and anti-republicans will be voting in favour of this bill—not because they necessarily support it but because they support the bill going to the people. I guess the final paradox of this debate is that it is necessary for some people to prepare the no case, and that means voting against the bill even though they support the bill being put to the people. I intend to vote no on the third reading for that reason.

Finally, I say that this is a special moment in the life of the parliament. We are either preparing for historic change or else preparing for a moment when Australia triumphantly reaffirms the system which has helped to make us, in my opinion, the freest, the fairest and the most prosperous country on earth.