



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 22 July 1999

AUSTRALIA ACTS (REQUEST) BILL

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (12.03 p.m.): Today I rise to speak on the Australia Acts (Request) Bill, which has created a wide gamut of feeling not only among honourable members but also others in the community. There is no issue that polarises people's opinions more than the possibility that their rights may be reduced, removed or altered in some way. Although most people do not readily express their views, the possibility or threat of change to the Constitution is the one thing that will bring them forward.

I am sure that members of the House have the best interests of Queensland in mind when they consider this Bill. Already Queensland has lost much of its power to the Federal Government and what power the State retains is negated by the fact that the State has the power but not the money; the Federal Government has the money. As we all know, many things are sacrificed to the almighty dollar. That is why any perceived threat to Queensland has to be scrutinised very carefully.

Among the general public there is little awareness about the fact that Queensland is subject to two Constitutions—the State Constitution and the Federal Constitution. The Queensland Electoral and Administrative Review Committee discovered this lack of knowledge about our Constitutions when it conducted its survey in 1993. Very soon the people of Queensland will be asked to vote on the proposed republic at both a State and Federal level. How can the people have an informed opinion when they are not fully aware of what is contained in our present Constitution and what rights and protections it affords us? How can they compare what was with what is to be when in both cases they have not yet been fully informed? There seems to be a need for education in plain, simple English.

I found this Bill extremely technical and, unlike the member for Toowoomba South, I must confess that I did not understand much of its technical content. This Bill is smoothing the way for the establishment of a republic. The people of Australia are looking for the facts, not the emotional rhetoric that flies around. This is perhaps the most important decision of the century for the Australian people. The closing of the century seems to have brought an urgency to the republican debate, which is very unfortunate. This momentous decision should not be rushed. Time should be taken to educate the people of this State as to what they already have.

To me, the recent decision that England is a foreign power, and the debate that decision has stimulated within constitutional legal circles, is a sign that we should slow this down and analyse the whole concept in finer detail. There is too much confusion, even amongst those who are reportedly experts on these matters. We are told constantly that Australia is socially and economically sound. If this is true, one has to ask why we want to change a formula that is working. What benefits are to be gained?

I am a typical Queenslanders and Australian. By nature, I am a fairly cautious person. I have had many discussions on this matter and I am not yet convinced that a republic is what the people really want, nor am I convinced as to what the changes and the benefits to Queensland will be in the long term. Until the people and I understand and fully comprehend the consequences, I cannot support this Bill. If there is a doubt as to the consequences of this action, I believe it is better to err on the side of caution. I have no doubt that Australia will in time come closer and closer to becoming a republic, but only when there is agreement across-the-board—when everyone knows what the outcomes will be. The republic proposal should be put forward by the Australian people and not a small section of the

community that perhaps has self-interest in mind. What causes me grave concern is the fact that even the republicans cannot agree on the type of republic they want. Any Bill that assists this rush into something that even those who want a republic disagree on cannot be supported. There is a wise old saying which, although it refers to marriage, should and does apply here: do this in haste and we will repent at leisure.
