

Australian republic: Bill Shorten reignites debate by casting doubt on relevance of the royals

Date: March 17, 2015



[Mark Kenny](#)

Chief political correspondent

[View more articles from Mark Kenny](#)

[Follow Mark on Twitter](#)



Opposition Leader Bill Shorten. Photo: Alex Ellinghausen

Bill Shorten has used a debate in Parliament over the rules governing order of royal succession to re-commit Labor to the case for an Australian republic.

The equivalent of Collingwood agreeing to play Essendon and Carlton at the same time

In a bold speech designed to distinguish Labor from a government which this year knighted Prince Philip – a decision that outraged voters and nearly caused the removal of Prime Minister Tony Abbott – the opposition leader said Australians no longer viewed their country as an outpost of empire, but rather as a proud and forthright nation of independent mind.

"If we were drafting our Constitution today, does anyone seriously dispute that we would require our head of state to be an Australian, this is how we see ourselves, this is who we are," he said.

Calling for a respectful, national conversation between equals rather than a celebrity-driven process, he said a multicultural nation no longer saw relevance in the British royals, even if they harboured affection for the reigning monarch.

"I and Labor believe it's time, it's time to breathe new life into the dream of an Australian republic," he told the House of Representatives on Tuesday.

Mr Shorten also thanked Mr Abbott for unintentionally giving the republican cause a kick along recently.

"The Prime Minister's decision to knight Prince Philip reminded us all how far we've travelled since the days of the famous words of Prime Minister (RG) Menzies who said of the young Queen Elizabeth II: "I did but see her passing by".

"I believe that Australians are ready for a discussion about an Australian head of state.

Mr Shorten also described as a grievous mistake the decision in the unsuccessful 1999 republic referendum of putting two questions, rather than one, to voters.

"The equivalent of Collingwood agreeing to play Essendon and Carlton at the same time," he said.

Much of the enthusiasm and energy of the "yes" cause, has lain dormant, since then."

He said it should not be long before the nation would "right an historical wrong" by correcting the national birth certificate to include the first peoples in the Constitution.

"The words in our constitution matter," he said.