

# Even in a Republic, the Commonwealth has a continuing role

By David Muir

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***We should not use public apathy towards Commonwealth Day and the current involvement of the royal family in the Commonwealth as reasons to walk away from it, writes [David Muir](#).***

WHILE IT'S TRUE that [Commonwealth Day](#) may no longer feature in many people's annual calendar of "must remember" diary dates, [Glenn Davies](#) is being perhaps a little harsh in suggesting the [Commonwealth](#) itself is irrelevant except to the British royal family.

While the [Real Republic Australia](#) wants to see our nation become a republic – with a genuinely directly elected Head of State, not one chosen for us by politicians or chosen from a shortlist drafted by politicians – I do not share the negative views about the Commonwealth of Nations that many others hold.

Just because the Commonwealth [morphed](#)

[out of the British Empire](#) does not mean it hasn't and won't continue to change.

Davies is correct in saying that members of the [British royal family](#) have viewed the Commonwealth in recent times as a vehicle to promote the monarchy and try to boost its relevance on the world stage even if their efforts involve having one of their own heads of an organisation that has grown very top-heavy with republics.

As Davies points out, the royal family has succeeded in having [Prince Charles designated](#) as the eventual successor to his mother Queen Elizabeth as the head of the Commonwealth.

But I suggest that decision – instigated by Her Majesty herself – was supported by Commonwealth member nations out of respect for her and the unique place she has courtesy of her lengthy reign and service.

As [Prince William's musings](#) suggest, there is no guarantee the template will stand and that he will follow his father as Head of the Commonwealth. The times do change.

The Commonwealth will never have the firepower of, say, [APEC](#), the [G7](#), or the [G20](#). It will not be called on to tread the line between peace and a third world war as [NATO](#) is doing right now.

The [Commonwealth Games](#) has a reputation

as being runner-up to the [Olympic Games](#) in the competition for global glamour sporting events.

But is all of that such a bad thing?

Surely any organisation like the Commonwealth that can assemble decision-makers from 54 varied nations – including 34 republics – to discuss issues of shared concern is worth keeping, supporting, and enhancing.

By the way, I don't think there are any wildly popular annual celebrations called APEC Day, G7 Day, G20 Day, or NATO Day.

The Real Republic Australia certainly proposes that Australia maintains its involvement in the Commonwealth once we are a republic – just like those 34 other member nations have done before us.

We also embrace the very word Commonwealth. We think that when we become a republic we should retain “Commonwealth of Australia” as our nation's official name.

The word “[commonwealth](#)” is not owned by monarchists and in fact has [republican antecedents](#).

These sorts of issues will be outlined in the discussion paper the Real Republic Australia will release in the coming months on our genuinely direct election model.

We recognise that resolving the issue of constitutional recognition of First Nations' people in line with the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) will be or should be a priority for the next federal government.

But we also believe that public debate on the wider issue of constitutional change including a republic should not stand still.

Rather than try to mandate specific constitutional amendments down to rewriting specific sections, we will be doing our best to actually engage Australians in discussing the ideas we have and which we believe they will support, especially having a real and direct say in choosing our Head of State.

There are other issues too that deserve to be considered and discussed, such as fixed and synchronised four-year terms for both houses of parliament, breaking the nexus governing the relative sizes of both houses, local government recognition, and implementing a fairer system for altering our Constitution among others.

Davies uses the low-key reception given to Commonwealth Day as a reason to promote an Australian republic.

We really don't need that excuse. The case for a republic can stand regardless of how active or involved the Commonwealth as a peak body and its members states and their citizens are prepared to be.

The republic campaign also stands regardless of what the royals do. The debate should not be a negative one attacking them, but a positive one about our future.

Davies notes that the only visible activity surrounding Commonwealth Day in March was church services [attended by the British royals](#).

There might well have been events in other Commonwealth nations that were not exposed by the UK and U.S.-centric stories that pass for foreign news coverage in the Australian media.

But couldn't the argument be mounted that only the royals take the time and effort to participate in such events, even if it is out of self-interest?

Is it slackness on the part of the rest of us that

causes Commonwealth Day to wither?

***David Muir is chair of the [Real Republic Australia](#) and was a Queensland delegate to the 1998 Constitutional Convention in Canberra elected as part of the team led by former Brisbane Lord Mayor, the late Clem Jones, advocating a directly elected head of state.***