

Deliberating Federalism: Can the Australian Public Help Resolve Federalism's Triple Challenge?

*Jacob Deem**

1 Introduction

On 28 June 2014, then Prime Minister of Australia Tony Abbott announced the Terms of Reference for a White Paper on Reform of the Australian Federation, triggering a year of intense intergovernmental and official engagement on imperatives and options for improving Australian federalism.¹ Earlier chapters in this volume have analysed many of the factors that led to the official abandonment of the reform process,² despite the increasingly concerning nature of Australian federalism.³ In this chapter, I problematise the process' lack of any real attempt to harness one of the most important sources of support for reform – the experiences and views of Australian citizens. Apart from one major public speech in a historic but remote town,⁴ a series of largely technical stakeholder roundtables hosted by officials, and minor investment in some outreach activity by a small expert advisory panel, the only attempt at wider civic engagement with the reform process was staged photo opportunities for the media.

The lack of public engagement is a problem endemic to federal reform in Australia. Arguably, it exemplifies concerns Gray and Brown raised in 2007, when they noted: 'many political leaders and commentators presume that if

* I thank Professor AJ Brown for his comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

1 Tony Abbott, *White Paper on the Reform of the Federation* (28 June 2014) <<http://webarchive.nla.gov.au/gov/20150622034513/http://www.pm.gov.au/media/2014-06-28/white-paper-reform-federation>>.

2 The White Paper process was officially announced as ended on 27 April 2016, with the Council of Australian Governments to pick up reform of the federation: Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate (27 April 2016) 30.

3 See, for example, Gabrielle Appleby, Nicholas Aroney and Thomas John (eds), *The Future of Australian Federalism: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Paul Kildea, Andrew Lynch and George Williams (eds), *Tomorrow's Federation: Reforming Australian Government* (The Federation Press, 2012).

4 Tony Abbott, 'Sir Henry Parkes Oration' (speech delivered at Tenterfield, Parliament of Australia, 25 October 2014) <<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressrel%2F3471877%22>>.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.