

## **To the Australian Commonwealth Parliament's inquiry into supporting democracy in the region**

*These were my introductory remarks at a video appearance on 10.8.23 before the parliamentary inquiry to which I had made submissions. On the day, it didn't happen because the IT wouldn't work.*

Thank you for the opportunity to appear. I have three headings:

- **electoral reform**
- **democracy**
- **RAMSI**

### **1. ELECTORAL REFORM**

PNG, Solomons and Vanuatu, each have a single chamber of parliament composed of single-member electorates. Stable democracy is not possible with this configuration. It doesn't work.

It doesn't work because it violates the separation of powers rule. The executive controls the legislature. We see this in all our lower houses. Without the curb of an upper house, politicians have open slather.

Either there has to be an upper house or the electoral system has to convert to multimember districts—or both.

This is not optional. We will never build “effective, accountable states that can sustain their own development” with the current structure.

### **2. DEMOCRACY**

James Madison's most famous saying:

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, no check on government would be necessary.”

How can non-angelic people live together and avoid tyranny? The US founders invented modern democracy.

Democracy is rule by the people. That's not a normative statement; it is just an objective definition.

We've had a couple of centuries of experimenting with various ways to realise the principle that the people rule.

So we might ask: Why, in the 1970s, did the colonial powers give these countries a unicameral parliament made of single-member districts? There was no precedent.

### 3. RAMSI

Quote from the RAMSI website: “RAMSI is helping the Solomon Islands to lay the foundations for long-term stability, security and prosperity...”

We spent about 3 billion dollars to make Solomon Islands safe. We made it safe for the politicians. Not for long. RAMSI left, protests broke out again, and Australian troops returned and again restored order. And again we did nothing about the crooked politics.

RAMSI lost a unique chance to reform the political system.

There are now claims that RAMSI had no mandate concerning the political system. That’s not true; all versions of the RAMSI website explicitly mention the parliament and electoral system.

I also hear the claim that RAMSI had no mandate concerning the settlement of Malaitans in Honiara. Not true. Land ownership is explicitly included.

During its presence, RAMSI introduced good policies and practices. What we learn is: good policies pursued by outside agencies do not produce democracy.

In propping up these countries we are propping up defective political systems. China can do that much better than we can.

I shouldn’t think fixing the political system would cost \$3 billion. And just think: it would be an investment. It wouldn’t be a subsidy with nothing to show, but an investment from which we may reasonably hope to get a return.

Thank you.

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See also

<http://www.pepperday.eu/politics/fixingpng.html>

<http://www.pepperday.eu/politics/supplementary.html>

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