

Subsidiarity: Towards an Australian Republic that Improves the Country



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Comments, ideas and discussion welcome.

Abstract

The Australian Unity Republic is a sovereign, republican Australia where the Australian Executive Council (AEC), comprising the Prime Minister and state/territory Premiers, would replace the Governor-General and state governors as the collective head of state.

Replacing the current ad hoc, uncoordinated Federal system with a collective head of state has several side benefits in addition to enhancing Australian sovereignty and independence. The leaders of the nation and the States would meet together on their own, monthly. This would create an opportunity for a continuous review of Australian democracy and the productivity of the whole of Australian government.

The benefits of centrality and the principles of subsidiarity could be balanced by the AEC. Reforms such as national driver's licenses, teachers' certification, child care workers' registration, Working with Children Checks (WWCC), safety checks, and business registrations and tax reform could be pursued alongside devolution of services to local government levels, the standardisation of local government boundaries, the constitutional recognition of local government, rationalisation of federal-state taxes, and more stable funding for local government.

In addition to formal Head of State functions, the AEC would operate as a tight leaders' forum, with monthly meetings taking agreed recommendations back to federal and state/territory cabinets for consideration, review and implementation. This paper follows three earlier papers on the AEC model and articulates subsidiarity principles and several possible reforms to enhance Australian productivity, equity, and unity.¹

¹ **Common Sense** (29 June 2025) <https://www.workingpapers.com.au/papers/common-sense>; **Productivity, Republicanism and Improving Whole of Government Efficiency**, (20 August, 2025) <https://www.workingpapers.com.au/papers/productivity-republicanism-and-improving-whole-australian-government-efficiency>; **A National Election Day**, (25 September, 2025) <https://www.workingpapers.com.au/papers/national-election-day>

Introduction

Australia's federal system, established in 1901, suffers from overlapping responsibilities across federal, state, and local levels, resulting in inefficiencies, red tape costing billions annually, and vertical fiscal imbalance (the federal government collects 80% of revenue). The Australian Unity Republic proposes a transformative approach by replacing monarchical representatives with the AEC, a republican head of state fostering collaboration among elected leaders. By applying subsidiarity, the AEC would streamline governance, ensuring decisions are made closest to those affected, with higher levels of government intervening only for scale or equity.

Medicare exemplifies this approach, federal funding and administration is paired with state delivery. Building on discussions around national standardization, including those raised by Anthony Albanese, the AEC would extend this model to critical areas. Proposed reforms include standardizing driver's licenses, teachers' certification, child care registration, WWCC, safety checks, business registrations, local government boundaries, auditing devolution, constitutional recognition of local government, tax rationalization, and stable local government funding. This paper details the AEC model, its governance principles, operational mechanisms, and legislative frameworks for these reforms.

The Australian Unity Republic: Core Elements

The Australian Executive Council (AEC)

The AEC would consist of nine members—the Prime Minister and Premiers/Chief Ministers of the six states (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania) and two territories (Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory)—serving as Australia’s collective head of state. It would exercise federal and state reserve powers (e.g., dissolving parliaments, appointing leaders) and ceremonial duties, such as representing Australia at international events or hosting national ceremonies. Decisions would require majority votes (5/9) for routine matters, two-thirds supermajorities (6/9) for critical reserve powers, and the Prime Minister’s tie-breaking vote limited to procedural issues, ensuring consensus-driven governance.

The AEC would operate as a tight leaders’ forum, with a streamlined schedule of monthly video conferences, quarterly in-person summits in rotating state capitals, and ad-hoc emergency meetings. This structure would be more efficient than the current biweekly federal and weekly state advisory councils, leveraging secure video platforms to reduce costs and focus on strategic coordination. The AEC would drive all other Australian government meetings and reforms.

How the AEC Would Operate

The AEC would function as a compact, high-level leaders’ forum designed to foster collaboration and drive federal-state reforms through a disciplined process of deliberation, decision-making, and action. Its primary mechanism would be monthly meetings, where the nine leaders would develop agreed recommendations to be taken back to their respective federal and state/territory cabinets for ministers to research, examine, and implement. Here’s a refined explanation of how this would work:

- **Monthly Meetings:** The AEC would convene monthly via secure video conferencing, ensuring a focused, agenda-driven forum. A dedicated AEC secretariat, staffed by senior officials from federal and state/territory governments, would prepare agendas based on reform priorities (e.g., national driver’s licenses, tax rationalization) and data from agencies like the Productivity Commission or ABS. Meetings would last 2–3 hours, with each leader allocated equal speaking time to present proposals, share jurisdictional insights, and address challenges. For example, the Queensland Premier might propose rural-specific testing for a national driver’s license, while the federal Minister for Transport provides data on interstate mobility. Discussions would emphasize subsidiarity, balancing national consistency with local needs.
- **Decision-Making Process:** The AEC would operate with a lean, consensus-oriented approach. Proposals would be debated using evidence-based inputs

(e.g., stakeholder reports, economic analyses), with decisions requiring a majority vote (5/9) for routine reforms (e.g., pilot programs) or a two-thirds supermajority (6/9) for significant actions (e.g., constitutional amendments). The Prime Minister's tie-breaking vote would resolve procedural deadlocks, ensuring efficiency. For instance, a proposal to standardize teachers' certification might involve AITSL presenting national standards, followed by a majority vote to endorse a framework, with clear timelines for cabinet action.

- **Recommendations to Cabinets:** After each meeting, the AEC secretariat would draft concise policy briefs or legislative proposals capturing agreed recommendations. These would be tailored to federal and state/territory contexts, ensuring alignment with jurisdictional priorities. Each AEC member—the Prime Minister and Premiers/Chief Ministers—would present these recommendations to their respective cabinets for further development. For example, the Prime Minister might table the *National Driver's License Act 2026* in federal cabinet, while the NSW Premier presents amendments to the *Road Transport Act 2013* in state cabinet. Federal and state ministers (e.g., Transport, Education, Treasury) would be tasked with researching feasibility, consulting stakeholders (e.g., unions, industry groups), and examining legal and fiscal implications. Cabinets would refine these proposals into actionable legislation or policies, with clear implementation plans.
- **Ministerial Research and Examination:** Federal and state ministers would conduct detailed analyses of AEC recommendations, leveraging departmental expertise. For instance, the federal Minister for Education might collaborate with AITSL to assess teacher certification standards, while state education ministers consult local school boards to ensure curriculum compatibility. This research phase would include cost-benefit analyses, stakeholder feedback, and pilot program designs. For tax rationalization, Treasury ministers would model GST redistribution impacts, ensuring equitable state shares. Ministers would report progress to their cabinets, proposing draft bills or funding allocations.
- **Implementation and Follow-Up:** The AEC would monitor implementation through quarterly summits, where members would present cabinet outcomes, legislative drafts, and pilot results. For example, the Victorian Premier might report on a child care WWCC pilot, detailing database integration and compliance rates. The AEC would use these updates to refine recommendations, address barriers (e.g., legal challenges), and ensure timely action. Emergency meetings would resolve urgent issues, such as funding disputes or stakeholder resistance. This iterative process ensures recommendations are practical, with ministers driving implementation through their portfolios.

This tight leaders' forum model ensures the AEC remains focused and efficient, with monthly meetings producing actionable recommendations that federal and state/territory cabinets translate into policy through rigorous research, examination, and implementation. By leveraging the authority of elected leaders, the AEC would bridge policy development and execution, fostering cooperative federalism.

Government House Transformation

Under the AEC model as has been outlined in earlier papers² Government Houses in Canberra, Sydney, and the six state capitals would be repurposed as museums for First Nations reconciliation and multiculturalism. Managed by a national council with Indigenous-led advisory boards, these hubs would showcase Indigenous history and Australia's diverse communities. Funding would come from savings generated by the model, creating inclusive spaces for cultural education.

Cost Savings

Also as outlined in earlier papers, eliminating the Governor-General (\$13–18 million annually) and state governors (\$13.5–25.5 million) would yield \$25.5–42.5 million in annual savings, with AEC operations costing \$0.5–1 million. These funds would support museum establishment (\$35–70 million) and initiatives like housing and job creation, aligning with national productivity goals.

Constitutional Amendments

The model would require federal and state constitutional amendments to remove monarchical references and vest powers in the AEC. Federal amendments would include:

- Preamble: Affirming the republic.
- Covering Clause 2 and Sections 1, 2, 61, 62: Establishing the AEC as head of state.
- New sections: Authorizing Government House transformations, productivity reforms, tax rationalization, and local government funding.

State amendments would mirror this, repealing governor appointments (e.g., NSW Constitution Act 1902, Section 3) and assigning powers to the AEC (e.g., NSW Section 5). Territories would amend self-government acts (e.g., ACT Self-Government Act 1988). A referendum under Section 128 would propose: “Do you approve amending the Constitution to establish the Australian Executive Council, comprising the Prime Minister and state and territory Premiers, as the head of state for the Australian Unity Republic, replacing the Governor-General and state governors?”

²² Ibid

The Principle of Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity ensures decisions are made at the lowest effective level, with higher levels intervening for scale or equity. Australia's federal system suffers from vertical fiscal imbalance and duplication, costing billions in inefficiencies. The AEC would apply subsidiarity to standardize where consistency is needed (e.g., national licensing, taxation) and devolve delivery to states or locals (e.g., service provision, local governance), as exemplified by Medicare's federal-state hybrid model. This approach would reduce red tape, enhance local autonomy, and promote equity.

Proposed Reforms for Federalism

The AEC would propose reforms to cut duplication, inspired by discussions on national standardization, including those raised by Anthony Albanese. Each reform would require federal legislation, with supportive state legislation to align local laws, ensuring a cooperative federal-state framework. The AEC's monthly leaders' forum would drive these reforms, with agreed recommendations taken to cabinets for ministers to research, examine, and implement. Below are detailed proposals, including legislative requirements:

National Driver's License

Objective: Simplify interstate mobility for approximately 1.5 million annual drivers, reducing administrative barriers.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *National Driver's License Act 2026* would establish national standards (e.g., age, demerit points, medical checks) via Services Australia, creating a centralized database with real-time updates and digital access (e.g., e-license with QR code verification).
- **State Legislation:** States would amend road traffic acts (e.g., NSW *Road Transport Act 2013*, QLD *Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995*) to align with federal standards for issuance, enforcement, and local testing, accommodating regional needs (e.g., rural conditions in Queensland).
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would refine standards using transport agency data, with Premiers presenting recommendations to state cabinets for legislative amendments and pilot designs, while the Prime Minister tables the federal act.
- **Implementation:** Phased rollout by 2028, with pilots in NSW and QLD. Estimated savings: \$200–300 million annually.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal standards ensure consistency; state delivery addresses local contexts.

National Teachers' Certification

Objective: Address teacher shortages (4,000 by 2025) by standardizing accreditation and enhancing mobility.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *National Teachers' Certification Act 2027* would authorize AITSL to set national standards for qualifications, professional development, and reciprocity, with a centralized register linked to federal funding.
- **State Legislation:** States would amend education acts (e.g., *VIC Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, *WA Teacher Registration Act 2012*) to integrate with local placement, training, and evaluations, allowing curricula adaptations (e.g., Indigenous knowledge in NT).
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would develop standards with AITSL input, with members presenting to cabinets for ministers to research feasibility (e.g., cost models) and consult stakeholders (e.g., teachers' unions).
- **Implementation:** Integrate with the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, with digital portals and scholarships for 1,500 teachers, prioritizing Indigenous educators. Rollout by 2027. Estimated savings: \$500 million in recruitment costs, with 20% retention improvement.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal framework for quality; state/local delivery for regional needs.

National Child Care Workers' Registration and Working with Children Check (WWCC)

Objective: Enhance child safety for 1.3 million children by closing state loopholes.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *National Child Care Workers' Registration Act 2026* would create a national database for registration and WWCC, managed by the National Office for Child Safety, with uniform criteria and police integration.
- **State Legislation:** States would amend child protection acts (e.g., *NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, *QLD Child Protection Act 1999*) for local checks and enforcement, adapting to state laws (e.g., NSW's 2025 WWCC training requirements).
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would finalize database specifications, with members presenting to cabinets for ministers to examine legal frameworks and pilot child safety measures.

- **Implementation:** Rollout by 2027, linked to 100,000 fee-free places, with pilots in VIC and SA. Estimated savings: \$100 million in administration, plus reduced legal costs.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal oversight for equity; state enforcement for accountability.

Safety Checks

Objective: Harmonize safety checks in industries like construction and mining, cutting \$2 billion in compliance costs.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *National Safety Checks Act 2027* would set standards for high-risk sectors via Safe Work Australia, with a centralized certification portal.
- **State Legislation:** States would amend occupational health and safety acts (e.g., *QLD Work Health and Safety Act 2011*, *SA Work Health and Safety Act 2012*) for inspections and local risk adaptation (e.g., WA mining safety).
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would assess compliance overlaps, with members presenting standards to cabinets for ministers to research sector impacts and implement pilot programs.
- **Implementation:** AI-assisted tools and a renewables pilot by 2027. Estimated savings: \$300–500 million.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal standards for scale; state implementation for local risks.

Business Registrations

Objective: Streamline registrations costing \$13.7 billion by 2025–26.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *National Business Registration Act 2026* would create a single portal integrating ABN with state requirements, using AI for approvals.
- **State Legislation:** States would amend business laws (e.g., *SA Business Names Registration Act 2016*, *TAS Business Names Registration Act 2011*) for sector-specific add-ons (e.g., NSW liquor licensing).
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would finalize portal specifications, with members presenting to cabinets for ministers to consult industries and implement secure data systems.
- **Implementation:** Blockchain for data security, with a small business pilot by 2026. Estimated savings: \$1.5 billion annually.

- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal simplification for economic growth; state customization for local needs.

Auditing Devolution to Local Government

Objective: Devolve 200+ duplicated functions (e.g., planning, waste) to local government, saving \$5–10 billion annually.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *Local Devolution Audit Act 2027* would mandate annual AEC-led reviews with stakeholder consultations.
- **State Legislation:** States would amend local government acts (e.g., TAS *Local Government Act 1993*, QLD *Local Government Act 2009*) to transfer powers and funding.
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would identify duplicated functions, with members presenting devolution plans to cabinets for ministers to research funding models and implement pilots.
- **Implementation:** National guidelines and pilot devolutions (e.g., community services) by 2027.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Devolution for local solutions; federal oversight for equity.

Standardization of Local Government Boundaries

Objective: Address inconsistent boundaries (e.g., 79 in Victoria, 128 in NSW) for equitable service delivery.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *National Local Government Boundaries Act 2028* would establish guidelines (e.g., population thresholds of 50,000–100,000, geographic equity) via an AEC review body.
- **State Legislation:** States would amend local government acts (e.g., SA *Local Government Act 1999*, WA *Local Government Act 1995*) to adjust boundaries with local input, building on models like the NSW Boundaries Commission.
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would develop guidelines using ABS data, with members presenting to cabinets for ministers to examine boundary impacts and conduct public consultations.
- **Implementation:** Phased reviews by 2030, with public hearings and ABS data mapping. Estimated savings: \$200–300 million, reducing disputes like NSW's 2025 mergers.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal standards for equity; state/local adaptation for viability.

Constitutional Recognition of Local Government

Objective: Entrench local government as a third tier, protecting it from state control.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *Constitutional Amendment (Local Government Recognition) Act 2027* would initiate a referendum under Section 128: “Do you approve amending the Constitution to recognize local government as a third tier, with powers devolved from states where appropriate?”
- **State Legislation:** Post-referendum, states would amend local government acts to define devolved powers and entrench funding.
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would draft referendum wording, with members presenting to cabinets for ministers to research public support and develop funding mechanisms.
- **Implementation:** Intergovernmental agreements for funding and roles by 2028.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal protection for autonomy; state/local definition of roles.

Rationalizing Federal-State Taxes

Objective: Address vertical fiscal imbalance and overlapping taxes (e.g., GST, payroll tax, stamp duties) to reduce complexity and compliance costs (\$6 billion annually, per Productivity Commission).

- **Federal Legislation:** The *National Tax Rationalization Act 2027* would reform tax overlaps by:
 - Consolidating GST distribution via a revised Commonwealth Grants Commission formula, ensuring equitable state shares based on population and economic need.
 - Phasing out inefficient state taxes (e.g., payroll tax, stamp duties) with federal offsets, such as increased GST shares or direct grants.
 - Establishing a Federal-State Tax Coordination Board under the AEC to oversee harmonization and compliance simplification.
- **State Legislation:** States would amend tax laws (e.g., NSW *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, VIC *Duties Act 2000*) to phase out redundant taxes and align with federal frameworks, retaining flexibility for local revenue needs (e.g., tourism levies in QLD).
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would finalize tax frameworks with Treasury input, with members presenting to cabinets for ministers to model economic impacts and consult businesses.

- **Implementation:** Phased transition by 2028, with pilots in SA and TAS. Estimated savings: \$4–6 billion annually in compliance and economic distortions.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal coordination for efficiency; state flexibility for local priorities.
- **Evidence:** The Henry Tax Review (2010) and Productivity Commission (2025) highlight inefficiencies in state taxes, recommending federal-state harmonization. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform discussions (2020–2025) support GST redistribution and payroll tax reform.

Secure Funding Base for Local Government

Objective: Reduce reliance on local rates (40–50% of council revenue, raising \$20 billion annually) by securing stable federal-state funding, easing pressure on households.

- **Federal Legislation:** The *Local Government Funding Act 2027* would:
 - Allocate a fixed GST share (e.g., 2–3%) to local government via the AEC, distributed based on population, socioeconomic need, and infrastructure demands (similar to the Financial Assistance Grants model).
 - Establish a Local Government Funding Authority to oversee disbursements and ensure accountability, linked to devolution audits.
- **State Legislation:** States would amend local government acts (e.g., QLD *Local Government Act 2009*, SA *Local Government Act 1999*) to integrate federal funding, reduce rate caps (e.g., Victoria’s 2.5% cap), and align with devolved responsibilities.
- **AEC Role:** Monthly meetings would design funding formulas, with members presenting to cabinets for ministers to research allocation models and implement pilot funding in rural councils.
- **Implementation:** Rollout by 2028, with pilots in NT and WA. Estimated impact: \$5–7 billion in additional funding, reducing rate hikes by 10–15%.
- **Subsidiarity Fit:** Federal-state funding for stability; local discretion for expenditure.
- **Evidence:** ALGA (2025) and Productivity Commission (2025) note local government’s funding insecurity, with rates covering only 50% of service costs. Past referendums (1988, 2013) on local government recognition underscore the need for constitutional funding protections.

Formal Principles of Subsidiarity Governance

The AEC would adopt these principles:

- Local Autonomy Principle: Decisions at the lowest level unless national scale is needed.
- National Standardization Principle: Federal standards for consistency in duplicated areas.
- Efficiency and Productivity Principle: Prioritize cost savings and red tape reduction.
- Equity and Inclusion Principle: Incorporate Indigenous and multicultural perspectives.
- Accountability Principle: Ensure transparency through audits and referendums.

Unity Vote Day: National Election Synchronization

The AEC would propose “Unity Vote Day” on the first Saturday in May every four years, synchronizing federal, state, and local elections. This would entail federal legislation (*National Elections Act 2026*) and state amendments to electoral laws (e.g., NSW *Local Government Act 1993*). The AEC’s monthly leaders’ forum would coordinate election planning, with members presenting to cabinets for ministers to research voter turnout strategies and implement Indigenous outreach inspired by ATSIC’s mobile polling. Implementation would save \$50–100 million per cycle and boost turnout by 5–10%.³

³ **A National Election Day**, (25 September, 2025) <https://www.workingpapers.com.au/papers/national-election-day>

Conclusion

The Australian Unity Republic, through the AEC, would transform federalism by applying subsidiarity to reduce duplication, empower local governance, and stabilize funding.

The AEC's tight leaders' forum, with monthly meetings, would produce agreed recommendations for federal and state/territory cabinets, where ministers would research, examine, and implement actions. Proposed reforms would save billions while promoting equity and reconciliation. Vote yes for a united, efficient Australia.

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