

Oaths of Allegiance Swearing and Her Majesty the Queen

JUSTICE Minister Phil Goff has announced a comprehensive review of New Zealand's oaths and affirmations. The oaths to be reviewed include those taken by new citizens, public office holders and some employees in the state sector. Oaths taken by professional groups and by witnesses in court are not being reviewed.

The review will consider:

- whether current oaths adequately reflect the values and beliefs important to New Zealanders in the 21st century;
- whether the language of oaths under review requires modernising; and
- options for changing, modernising, replacing or removing the oaths under review.

Phil Goff also said it was "timely to consider whether our oaths accurately reflect the values and beliefs important to New Zealanders in the 21st century".

The NZ Herald had a different view in an editorial (1 Jan 2004), suggesting that this might be "an imposition of republicanism by stealth" and stressing the need for "comprehensive consultation - and a willingness to accede to popular sentiment".

The Republican Movement welcomes the review, as the various oaths unnecessarily include references to the monarch. There is actually no strong reason for anyone to swear allegiance to the Queen, whether we are a republic or a monarchy.

Most democracies have people swear allegiance to the country or the constitution, rather than the head of state. There are also oaths still on the statute books that are no longer used, such as the oaths for teachers to swear allegiance to the Queen.

Whatever approach is taken must, however, include serious consultation.

An officials' working group, led by the Ministry of Justice, will undertake the review, seeking public input in early April, and reporting back to ministers by 30 June.

The review is the first one in almost 50 years and follows on from reviews in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and Jamaica.

Supreme Court up and ready to go

THE Supreme Court replaced the Privy Council on 1 January 2004, ending a debate that has lasted decades.

The country's new highest court, headed by Chief Justice Dame Sian Elias, is to begin hearing appeals from the start of July.

While abolishing the Privy Council was not necessary to becoming a republic, the issues have always been closely linked in the public mind, as they both deal with issues of independence, pragmatism and national identity.

One of the key themes raised by the Supreme Court debate was the accusation of "republicanism by stealth", and the need for real consultation over constitutional change.

The Republican Movement will be preparing a detailed review of the Supreme Court establishment from a republican perspective. Any members interested in participating should email info@republic.org.nz.

spoken

"Some of the oath provisions on the statute book are now obsolete while others use old-fashioned and unduly complex language."

—Justice Minister Phil Goff

"The removal of old and archaic language ... is one thing, but Mr Goff is signalling that an opportunity may also be taken to remove references to the Queen in such oaths. He needs to be reminded that she is not only the Head of the Commonwealth but Queen of New Zealand."

—National MP Richard Worth

"Not one person in a hundred knows what the letters PCNZOM mean. We think it translates to Political Correctness award from a New Zealand that was Once a Monarchy."

—ACT leader Hon Richard Prebble

"It's a credible, reliable and well-equipped army - not brand identity - that assures New Zealanders that they are protected."

—National MP Simon Power

"Gauging from the outdated, Vietnam-era equipment Mr Power's party left our forces with, I suppose he feels the logo should still be in the 1960s as well."

—Defence Minister Mark Burton

"If politicians continue to make constitutional changes by stealth, New Zealand will become a confused, despondent, politically correct backwater, instead of the confident beacon of success we all hope for."

—Brendan Harr, letter to The Press



New army logo sets stage for new flag



THE army has replaced its old crest with a new logo to encourage recruitment.

While the logo stirred up the usual controversy about design costs, it is part of a compelling debate about New Zealand's symbols.

The old crest (left) has a sword and taiaha crossed behind a crown and a lion. The new logo (right) incorporates the silver fern: the army said that it "symbolises national pride".

The army's choice of the silver fern reflects the choice made by many groups when seeking to make a statement about New Zealand.

Businessman Lloyd Morrison continued the silver fern theme with a flag proposal: a stylised silver fern on a black background.

"It's not a criticism of the past, wanting to change the flag, but to look at where we are going in the future. Our present flag does not represent our identity," he said.

Morrison wants to encourage a groundswell for a new flag, saying Helen Clark "doesn't want to put her political career at risk but I bet if 65% of New Zealanders want a change, she's not going to stop it".

The response has been mixed. The Government has kept out of the



debate, while the usual letters have come in about white feathers, pirate colours, and more.

A few editorials have been positive, and an RSA spokesperson agreed to change if it was based on a referendum.

The flag debate is closely related to republicanism and the Republican Movement will keep an eye on the issue. Check out the following links for [British related flags](#) and [another proposed New Zealand flag](#).

stealthy change

by Dave Guerin

The new conservative catchword is "republicanism by stealth", alleging the Government is pushing through change without consultation.

While republicans endorse the abolition of knighthoods, the establishment of the Supreme Court and the pending removal of the Queen's Counsel designation, we also urge care in how these changes are brought about.

This Government has now surpassed the Bolger Government's record of republican-friendly actions, but there are few of the open statements that characterised Jim Bolger's actions.

If senior members of the Government want a republic, then they must start discussing the issue publicly.

The Supreme Court debate missed a golden opportunity to trial republican arguments, but the oaths and affirmations issue provides another chance. Phil Goff's recent statements on removing references to the Queen are very encouraging.

Pining for Knights and Dames

ACT Leader Richard Prebble is longing after the lost days of knighthoods and damehoods, abolished in 2000.

He argued that the current awards were meaningless and that no one knew what the letters PCNZOM meant. "We think it translates to Political Correctness award from a New Zealand that was Once a Monarchy."

Mt Prebble said New Zealand "should celebrate the fact that we are a monarchy, not a boring republic like most of the rest of the world".

He may be half right: the the names of New Zealand's awards are not particularly memorable. In the March 1996 newsletter, we quoted

Doug Graham deriding the imagined Order of the Pukeko. We argued then – and argue now – that the Order of the Pukeko sounded much better than the Order of the Garter, Thistle or Bath.

The New Zealand honours system does not have memorable awards and we should do something about that – but taking a backward step to knighthoods is definitely not the right answer.

As an aside, the United Kingdom is currently reviewing honours and is considering abolishing knighthoods.

Detailed information can be found at the public administration select committee's [website](#).

Australian republic back on agenda

THE Australian Senate's legal and constitutional references committee is currently consulting on its inquiry into an Australian republic.

Its report provides a useful summary of the process leading up to the 1999 referendum, as well as going over the issues that would have to be considered in developing a new republic model for Australia.

The Australian Republican Movement chairman, Professor John Warhurst, welcomed the issue paper and put forward the ARM's desire for a three plebiscite process: one to vote for a republic; one to vote for a republic model; and one to vote for a title for the head of state.

The report can be found at the committee's [website](#).

