



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on February 4, 2023

Australia to Replace British Monarchy With Indigenous Design on Bank Note

SINGAPORE — The left-leaning Australian government under Prime Minister Anthony Albanese indicated its plans to drop the head of the British royal family from its five-dollar bank note, replacing the image of the late Queen Elizabeth II with a design slated to commemorate the country's indigenous people.

The new note will be a tribute to the first Australians, the Reserve Bank said in a statement. This decision came after a consultation with the federal government.

"The five-dollar note will say more about our history and our heritage and our country," Treasurer Jim Chalmers told reporters in Melbourne. "I see that as a good thing."

The government had already hinted last September, shortly after the queen's passing, that it would not use the image of her son, King Charles III, on the new banknote.

It will take a number of years for the note to be designed and printed, after consultation with First Nations people.

Together with Canada, New Zealand, and other former colonies of the British Empire, Australia still regards the British monarch as the head of state. While a referendum in 1999 to become a republic was narrowly defeated, the debate has resurfaced amid Australia's rising stature as a regional power and vital economy. Previous polls indicated that the population is roughly divided about becoming fully independent from Britain.

Albanese hinted that he would like to see a national referendum on Australia becoming a republic during his stint in office, making an Australian the head of state. However, he also confirmed his government would not conduct the referendum during his first term.

While King Charles III was officially declared Australia's head of state during a ceremony outside Parliament House in Canberra after the queen's death, Albanese — an outspoken republican — remarked that it was not appropriate to broach the matter at that time.

Meanwhile, the Australian Republic Movement (ARM), fronted by former Wallaby and media personality Peter FitzSimons, has long called for the nation to ditch the monarch as its head of state. After the queen's death, the ARM called for her image to be removed from the five-dollar note and asked the government to refrain from using King Charles III's image on 2023 coins, according to a report from



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The Australian.

Based on ARM sources, the currency change would be the “first point of order” for the ARM, with one group member telling *The Australian* it was “ridiculous” to automatically have the king’s image on Australian coins. Although the ARM honored Queen Elizabeth immediately after her death, it claimed it was the right time for Australia to take the next step toward full independence.

“The Queen backed the right of Australians to become a fully independent nation during the referendum on an Australian republic in 1999, saying that she has ‘always made it clear that the future of the Monarchy in Australia is an issue for the Australian people and them alone to decide, by democratic and constitutional means,’” the statement read.

FitzSimons himself expressed condolences at the queen’s passing. “During her reign, Australia has grown into a mature and independent nation. It is unlikely we will ever see a Monarch as respected or admired by the Australian people again,” he said.

The queen was the only monarch to be shown on Australia’s decimal currency, which was introduced in 1966. In 1995, the five-dollar bank note was also bedecked with her portrait at the age of 58.

In 2022, Britain’s Royal Mint said that it would start the time-consuming process of switching the late queen with the king on British stamps and currency. Furthermore, the government declared that the king’s profile would appear on Australian coins at some point in 2023.

While coins are required to carry the image of the British monarch, Federal Assistant Minister for the Treasury Andrew Leigh said that the decision to include the queen’s image on the five-dollar note was about her personality instead of her status as the monarch, and any changes would not be “automatic.”

When questioned by a reporter if the government would contemplate substituting the British monarch with an Australian such as indigenous land-rights activist Edward Mabo, Leigh said: “It will be a conversation to be had down the track. It is a conversation that will take place in the government. There’s no rush about it. The priority now is changing over the coins.”

The Royal Australian Mint, the sole producer of coins in the country, announced on Tuesday that it will not issue any circulating coins with the effigy of Queen Elizabeth in 2023.

Around 15 billion coins have been minted in the likeness of Queen Elizabeth II since her coronation in 1953. The mint makes between 110 million and 150 million coins yearly.

The king’s image is still poised to appear on coins that currently bear the image of the late monarch.

Nonetheless, critics insisted that this move is politically motivated and another indirect way to shift Australia toward the republican route.

Peter Dutton, leader of the opposition conservative coalition, claimed the central bank’s decision was politically motivated. “There’s no question about this, that it’s directed by the government and I think the prime minister should own up to it,” he said on local radio station 2GB.

In addition, fans of the late Steve Irwin launched a petition nominating the television star to replace King Charles III on the new five-dollar bills. Petitioners Vincent Wu and Kirby Miles spearheaded the move, now listed on the Australian Parliament House website, to promote the late zookeeper, conservationist, television personality, wildlife expert, and environmentalist.

“The death of Queen Elizabeth II and the proclamation of King Charles III raises an important question about the future of Australian currency,” Miles said in his petition. “We propose keeping all existing



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five-dollar notes featuring Queen Elizabeth II in circulation and introducing a new five-dollar note honoring Australian zookeeper Steve Irwin.”

Wu echoed Miles’ statement, asserting that there is no one “more vital to Australian culture” than the Crocodile Hunter. “Steve is beloved by all and has become synonymous with the Australian values we hold so dearly,” he said. “He epitomized the spirit of mateship; he deeply loved the Australian wildlife, working hard towards conservation and education but perhaps most importantly he’s just a good bloke.” The petition is not the first time the late wildlife activist, who died in 2006 after being stung fatally in the heart by a stingray, has been nominated to feature on Australia’s currency.

At the moment, King Charles III is the head of state in Australia, New Zealand, and 12 other Commonwealth realms outside the United Kingdom.



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