

Head of Commonwealth must act only on advice

by Francis Bennion

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Doubts about the constitutionality of the Queen's speech in support of the new Charter of the Commonwealth cannot be dismissed as airily as Libby Purves (11 March 2013) would have us believe. On controversial questions the Head of the Commonwealth is supposed to act only on political advice. It is clear from the researches reported by Ms Purves that, if asked, the governments of many Commonwealth countries would strongly advise Her Majesty not to speak in support of a document which, as Ms Purves puts it, says in effect that the Commonwealth is implacably opposed to all forms of discrimination against women generally, or against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Presumably these governments were not asked.

In Britain we may well regret that such is the case, and urge such countries to change what we consider to be their backward social policies. That is not the point. The actual point is that it can only endanger the Commonwealth if it promulgates opinions on social issues with which a substantial number of the member states profoundly disagree.

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References:

None

¹ Published unchanged in *The Times* 12 March 2013.