



Hawke, Howard debate our future



AAP

Former PMs Bob Hawke and John Howard last night

AUSTRALIA should abolish state governments and become a republic at the end of the current monarch's reign, former prime minister Bob Hawke suggested last night.

Mr Hawke's comments were made during a debate with one of his old sparring partners, fellow former prime minister John Howard, in Sydney.

The two leaders fronted a 200-strong audience at the 5th Oxford Business Alumni Forum and canvassed a range of issues, including population, health reform, the nation's relationship with China and climate change.

The pair were asked how they hoped the nation looked in 2050. Mr Hawke said he would like to see Australia a republic by then.

It was the first time the pair had gone head to head in public since leaving office, and was the first debate of its kind between two former prime ministers.

The leaders also addressed Australia's system of government, and the relevance of

state governments. "If we were starting this country again you wouldn't have states, you'd have regions," Mr Howard said to applause.

"Over time, I hope the states have less and less authority. This health deal is interesting . . . the states seem to have come out of this with more authority."

Mr Hawke agreed with the proposal to abolish the states, but said there were still some reasons to keep the boundaries in tact.

"We should keep the boundaries for the purposes of Sheffield Shield cricket and State Of Origin . . . but that's it," he said.

Mr Howard said he also sympathised with the states' recent outcry over giving up a portion of their GST to fund the Rudd government's federal health takeover.

However, Mr Howard said he had faith that Australia would continue to prosper regardless of what system of government was in power.

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