



PEO

Parliamentary Education Office

GET Parliament

HOW **YOUR** FEDERAL PARLIAMENT WORKS



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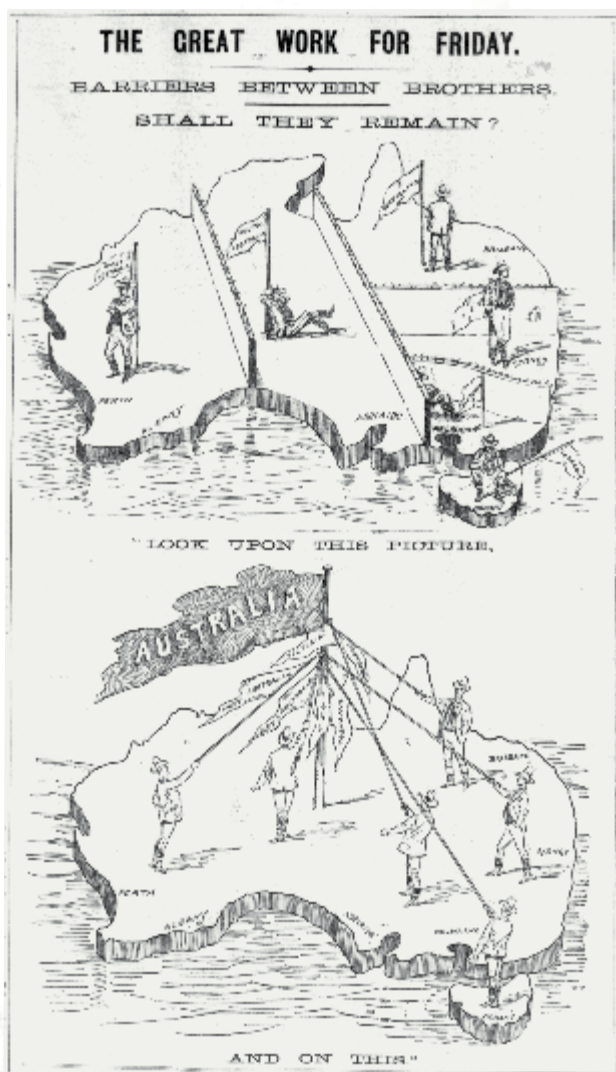
Federation

Australia unites

Australia became a nation on 1 January 1901 when the six colonies (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania) united to form the Commonwealth of Australia. This historical process is known as federation.

Before 1901 Australia did not exist as a nation. It was a collection of six British colonies which were partly self-governing, but under the law-making power of the British Parliament. The colonies were like six separate countries. Each had its own government and laws, its own defence force, issued its own stamps and collected tariffs (taxes) on goods that crossed its borders. The colonies even had different railway systems.

**Before 1901,
Australia was a
collection of British
colonies. It did not
exist as a nation**



A cartoon published in *The Argus* newspaper in 1898 urged colonists to federate

Federation fever

In the 1880s and 1890s popular support for federation grew as people began to believe that the colonies would be stronger and more efficient if they united. It was felt a national government was needed to deal with issues such as trade, foreign policy, immigration and defence. Although most colonists were of British descent and looked to Britain as the 'mother country', they had started to see themselves as belonging to one separate nation.

GET THIS...

Western Australia was the last colony to join the federation. Its government was concerned that federation would give New South Wales and Victoria an advantage over less powerful states. Western Australia agreed to federate in a referendum held on 31 July 1900, two weeks after the Constitution became law in Britain.

Path to federation

Before the colonies could join together they needed a constitution to set out the rules for how Australia would be run.

The Australian Constitution was written at a series of conventions (meetings) attended by delegates from the colonies. The first convention met in Sydney in 1891. It produced a draft that became the basis for the Constitution. The final draft was completed at three meetings held in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne in 1897 and early 1898.

The Constitution was then approved by a vote of the people in referendums held in each colony between June 1899 and July 1900.

The Constitution had to be agreed to by the British Parliament before federation could proceed. A delegation that included Sir Edmund Barton (who became Australia's first Prime Minister) travelled to London to present the Constitution to the British Parliament.

The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act was passed by the British Parliament in July 1900. It allowed the six colonies to become Australian states and created the federal, or Commonwealth, Parliament.



This cartoon from British magazine Punch shows that even in Britain federation had popular support. The umpire tells the Australian cricket team: "You've done jolly well by combination in the cricket field, and now you're going to federate at home. Bravo, boys!"



Children celebrating federation, Melbourne 1901

One people, one destiny

The Commonwealth of Australia was declared on 1 January 1901 at a ceremony held in Centennial Park in Sydney. During the ceremony the Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun, was sworn in. Australia's first Prime Minister and federal ministers took the oath of office.

Australians welcomed nationhood. Up to 500 000 people lined the route of the federation parade that travelled from the Domain to Centennial Park. About 100 000 spectators witnessed the ceremony that followed. Australians were ready to unite under the slogan 'one people, one flag, one destiny'.



Nationhood, Centennial Park, Sydney

The Australian Constitution

Birth certificate of a nation

The Australian Constitution provides the rules for the governance of Australia. Described as the birth certificate of the nation, the Constitution is made up of eight chapters and 128 sections.

It united the six self-governing British colonies as separate states, within the Commonwealth of Australia. While each state kept its own parliament, the Constitution also created a Commonwealth (federal) Parliament. This sharing of responsibilities between the federal Parliament and state parliaments gave Australia a 'federal' system of government.

The Constitution also describes what the federal Parliament can make laws about and how it shares power with the states. Under the Constitution, the states kept many of their existing powers. The federal Parliament was given responsibility for areas that affected the whole nation. Sections 51 and 52 of the Constitution outline most of the law-making powers of the federal Parliament.



Constitution Act. An Act of the British Parliament was needed to create the Commonwealth of Australia

Separation of powers

The Constitution established three groups – the Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary – and described the roles that they play in governing Australia. The power to make and manage federal law is divided between these three groups.

This division is based on the principle of the 'separation of powers'. Under this principle, the power to make and manage law is shared so that each group keeps a check on the actions of the others. This prevents the misuse of power.

Australia does not have a complete separation of powers because some of the roles of the Parliament and the Executive overlap. For example, the Executive is chosen from among government members of the Parliament, and members of the Judiciary (High Court judges) are appointed by the Governor-General.



THE PARLIAMENT

is made up of:

- the **Queen** (represented by the **Governor-General**)
- the **Senate**
- the **House of Representatives**.

The Parliament has legislative power, which means it can make and change laws.



THE EXECUTIVE

(also known as the executive government) includes:

- the **Prime Minister**
- **ministers**.

The Executive puts laws into action and carries out the business of government. The Constitution gives the Queen executive power; in reality, it is the Prime Minister and ministers who perform the work of the executive. However, they regularly inform the Governor-General (the Queen's representative) about this work.



THE JUDICIARY

is made up of **all federal courts**, including the High Court.

The High Court acts like an umpire. It interprets the Constitution and existing laws. It also resolves disagreements between the federal and state governments about their law-making powers. Since federation, rulings made by the High Court have strengthened the law-making role of the federal Parliament.

The Constitution can only be changed if the Australian people agree. A proposed change must be approved by the federal Parliament. It then has to be put to the Australian people in a special vote called a referendum.

For the change to be agreed to, it must gain a double majority. This means that the referendum has to be approved by:

- a majority of voters in a majority of states (at least four of the six states)
- a national majority of voters (more than half the voters in Australia must vote YES).

Territory voters are counted in the national majority.

Nineteen referendums proposing 44 changes to the Constitution have been held since federation. However, only eight changes have been agreed to by the Australian people.

When deciding on Australia's system of government, the colonial leaders looked to other countries. Many features of Australia's parliamentary democracy mirror those of Britain, while several of the federal elements were inspired by the United States.



Australia became a nation after people voted in referendums

The Australian people have agreed to eight changes to the Constitution. Some of these include:

- giving the federal Parliament power to provide social services such as maternity allowances, widows' pensions, child endowment, unemployment and sickness benefits (1946)
- giving the federal Parliament power to make laws for Aboriginal people and to include all Aboriginal people in the national population count (1967)
- filling casual vacancies in the Senate with a person from the same political party as the senator being replaced (1977).

Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) 1967

DIRECTIONS. Mark your vote on this ballot-paper as follows:

If you **APPROVE** the proposed law, write the word **YES** in the space provided opposite the question.

If you **DO NOT APPROVE** the proposed law, write the word **NO** in the space provided opposite the question.

DO YOU APPROVE the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled—

“An Act to alter the Constitution so as to omit certain words relating to the People of the Aboriginal Race in any State and so that Aboriginals are to be counted in reckoning the Population”?

[illegible]

Nearly 91%
of Australians
voted 'YES'
in the 1967
referendum
– the largest
ever 'YES' vote

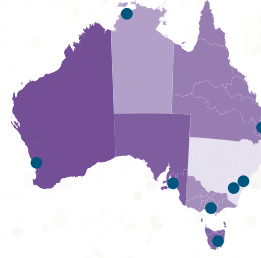
Three levels of law-making

Governing Australia

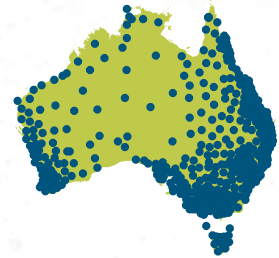
There are three levels of law-making in Australia – often referred to as the three levels of government – that work together to provide Australians with the services they need. Representatives are elected to federal and state/territory parliaments and local councils in separate elections.



FEDERAL



STATE/TERRITORY



LOCAL

Different responsibilities

Generally, each level of government provides different services to the people of Australia.

The federal government has power over issues that affect the whole nation. These are listed in section 51 of the Australian Constitution. Among other things, the federal government can make laws about defence, immigration, trade, foreign affairs, industrial relations, transport, social security and family support, postal and telephone services and taxation.

State and territory governments make decisions about areas that are not looked after by the federal government. For example, they are responsible for matters such as hospitals, schools, public transport, police and forests.

Local councils were established by state governments to look after the needs of a city or local community. Local government responsibilities include town planning, pet control, rubbish collection and recycling, and recreation facilities such as parks and swimming pools.

There are times when these different responsibilities overlap. For example, local roads are provided through the cooperation of federal, state/territory and local governments. Each level of government contributes money towards building and maintaining roads.

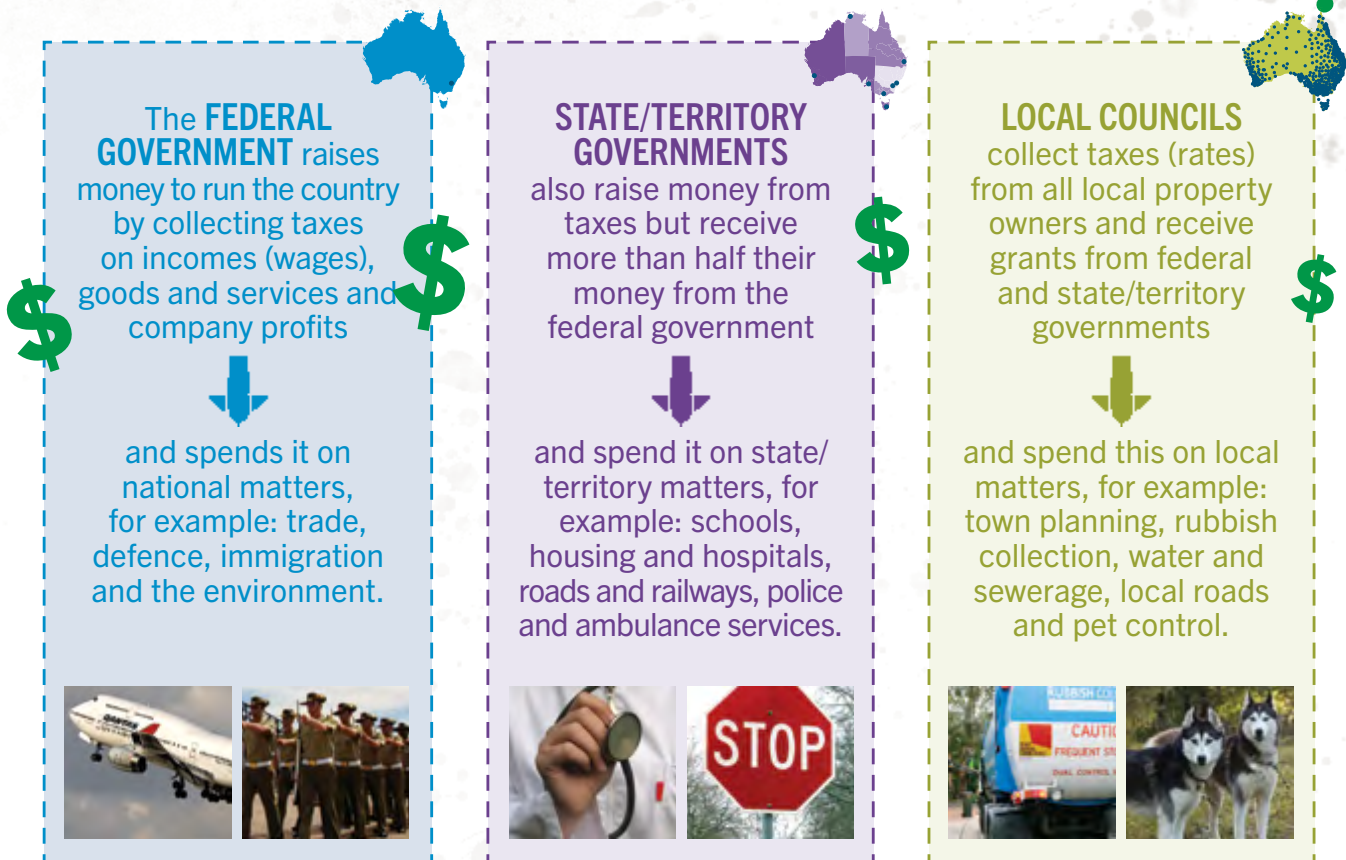
Because of its small geographical size the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) does not have local councils. The ACT government takes care of territory and local government matters.

GET THIS...

Australia has one federal government, six state and two territory governments, and over 560 local councils. This means most Australians are governed by three sets of laws.

The powers of the federal government are listed in section 51 of the Constitution

Who is responsible for what?



Which law?

Under section 109 of the Constitution, if a state Parliament and the federal Parliament pass conflicting laws on the same subject, then the federal law overrides the state law. Section 122 of the Constitution allows the federal Parliament to override a territory law at any time.

The federal Parliament has only used its power under section 122 on a few occasions and usually only when the territory law is controversial. For example, in 1997 the federal Parliament passed a law to overturn the Northern Territory's *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* which had made euthanasia legal in the territory.



Parliament House – the federal Parliament meets in Canberra

Electing members of parliament

Representative democracy

Australia is a representative democracy which means that Australians elect members of parliament to make laws and decisions on their behalf. At a federal election, Australians elect members of parliament to represent them in federal Parliament. All Australians aged 18 years and over must enrol to vote.

The federal Parliament is bicameral which means that it consists of two houses—the Senate and the House of Representatives. There are 150 members in the House of Representatives. Each member represents an electorate in Australia. Electorates are based on population—on average, 94 000 voters live in each electorate. This means that states with larger populations have more electorates and therefore more members in the House.

How preferential voting works

To be elected, a candidate must have an absolute majority of votes (more than 50% of the total votes). In the example below using 100 votes, the absolute majority is 51 or more.



1st count	39	35	20	6
-----------	----	----	----	---

No one has 51 or more votes, so **Lauren's votes are transferred** (distributed) according to second preferences.



39	35	20	6
1	4	1	

2nd count	40	39	21
-----------	----	----	----

No one has 51 or more votes, so **Joe's votes are transferred** (distributed) according to the next preferences.



40	39	21
6	15	

3rd count	46	54
-----------	----	----

Ari is elected with 54 votes.

The Senate has 76 senators. Each Australian state is represented by 12 senators. The states were given equal representation in the Senate so that states with larger populations did not dominate the Parliament. Since 1975, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory have each been represented by two senators.

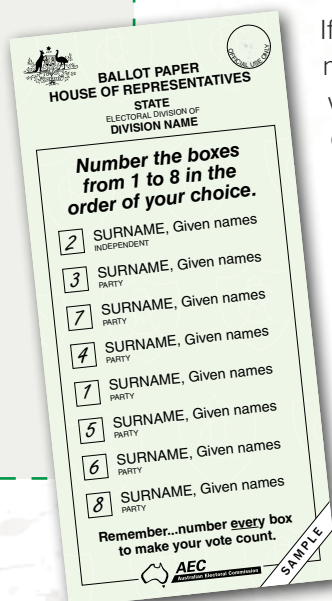
Elections

House of Representatives

Elections for the House of Representatives use a preferential voting system to elect one member for each electorate. A candidate must get an absolute majority (more than 50% of the votes) to be elected.

Voters write a number beside the name of every candidate on the ballot paper: '1' for their first preference (or choice), '2' for their second preference and so on.

If a candidate gets an absolute majority of first preference votes, that candidate wins. If no candidate has enough first preference votes for an absolute majority, then the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded and their votes are transferred to the remaining candidates, according to voters' second preferences. This process of excluding candidates and redistributing votes continues until one candidate achieves an absolute majority.



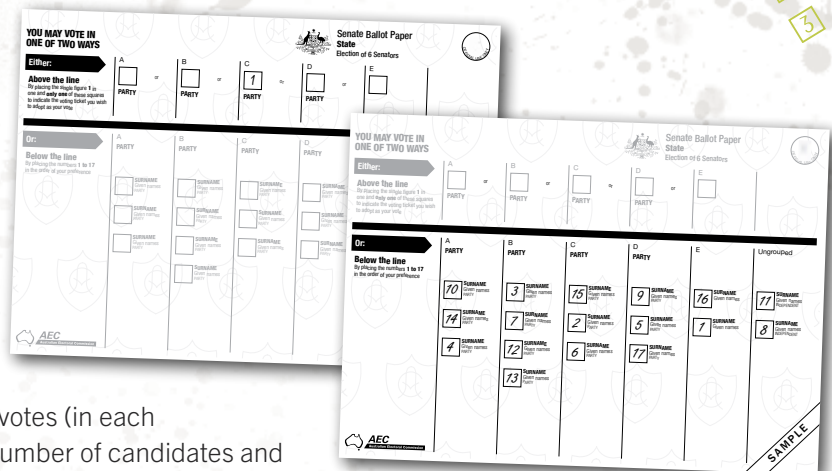
Senate

In Senate elections, Australians are voting to fill more than one vacancy. Elections for the Senate use a more complex voting system known as proportional representation. This means senators must get a 'quota' of first and later preferences that equals a set quota (or proportion) of votes.

The number of votes required is obtained by dividing the total number of votes (in each state or territory) by one more than the number of candidates and then adding one to the result. Under this system, Independents and smaller parties have a greater chance of being elected to the Senate.

Senate ballot papers list all the names of the candidates and the political parties to which they belong, followed by ungrouped or individual candidates. Senate ballot papers are divided into two sections because voters have a choice of voting 'above-the-line' or 'below-the-line'.

- **Above-the-line** voting means that voters only have to put a number '1' in the box above the party or group they choose. The party or group has already registered with the Australian Electoral Commission and indicated how it wants its preferences shared out. These preferences are then distributed for the voter.
- **Below-the-line** voting requires voters to write a number in the box beside every name on the ballot-paper; '1' for their first preference, '2' for their second preference and so on, until all the boxes are numbered.



Calculating the quota

For electing six state senators

SENATORS REQUIRED: 6

TOTAL VOTES: 700 000
(for simplicity)

$$\frac{700\,000}{6 + 1} + 1 = \text{quota}$$

$$700\,000 \div 7 = 100\,000$$

$$100\,000 + 1 = \mathbf{100\,001}$$

QUOTA = 100 001

GET THIS...

Women were given the right to vote in federal elections in 1902, making Australia one of the first countries to give women the vote. In 1962 all Aboriginal Australians were granted the right to vote in federal elections.

When are federal elections held?

Under section 28 of the Constitution, members of the House of Representatives are elected for a maximum term of three years, although elections may be called earlier.

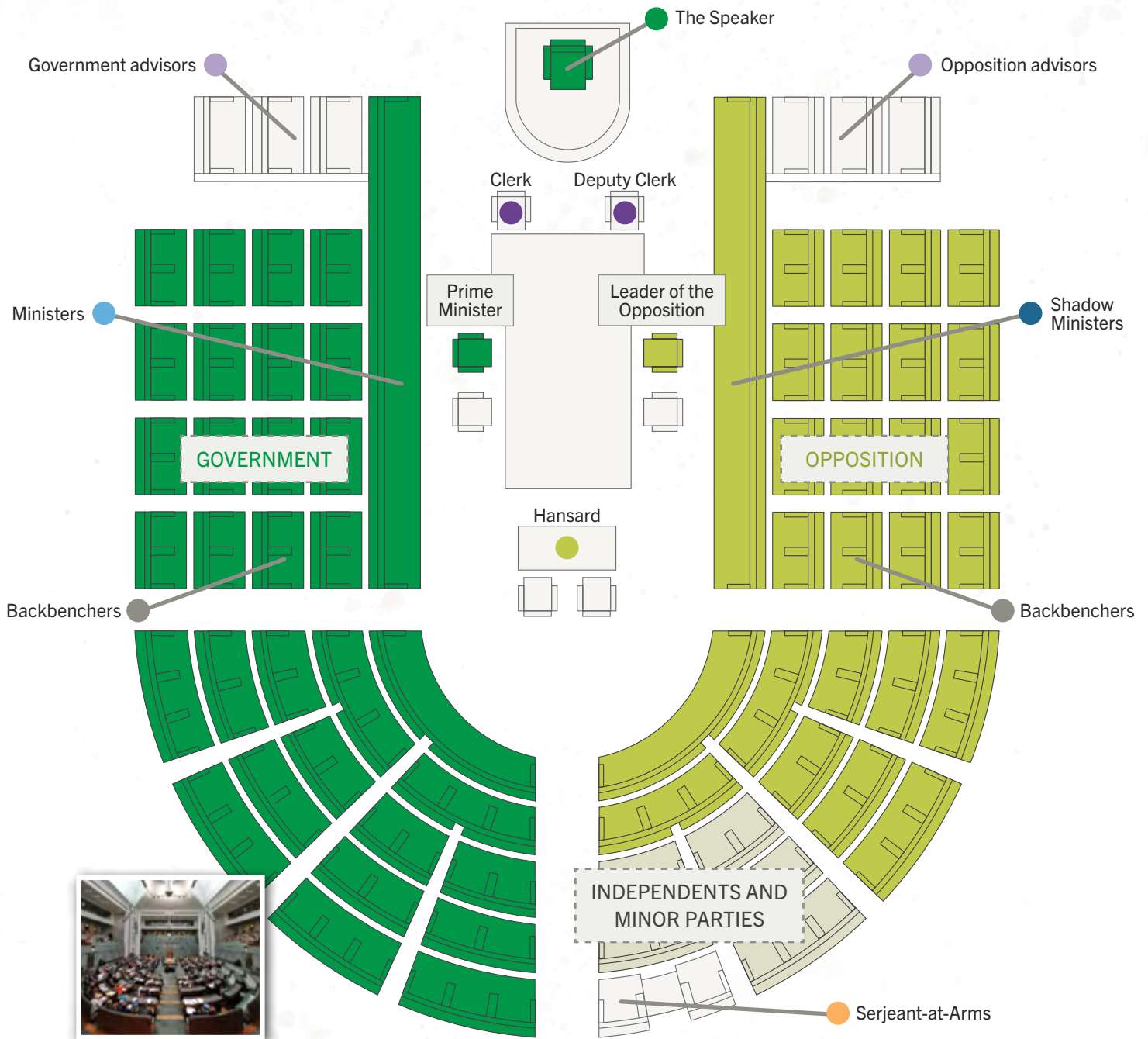
State senators are elected for a period of six years. The Senate is elected on a rotating basis, with half the Senate elected every three years. Newly-elected state senators begin their six-year term on 1 July following an election. When an election for the House of Representatives is called, a half-senate election is usually held at the same time.

The six-year term and system of rotation in the Senate means that it has a continuing membership and reflects the views of Australian voters at different times. The Senate's six-year term strengthens its role as a house of review. It gives senators more time to become expert at examining important issues, proposed laws and the work of the government.

The terms of territory senators are the same as the members of the House of Representatives.

The houses of Parliament

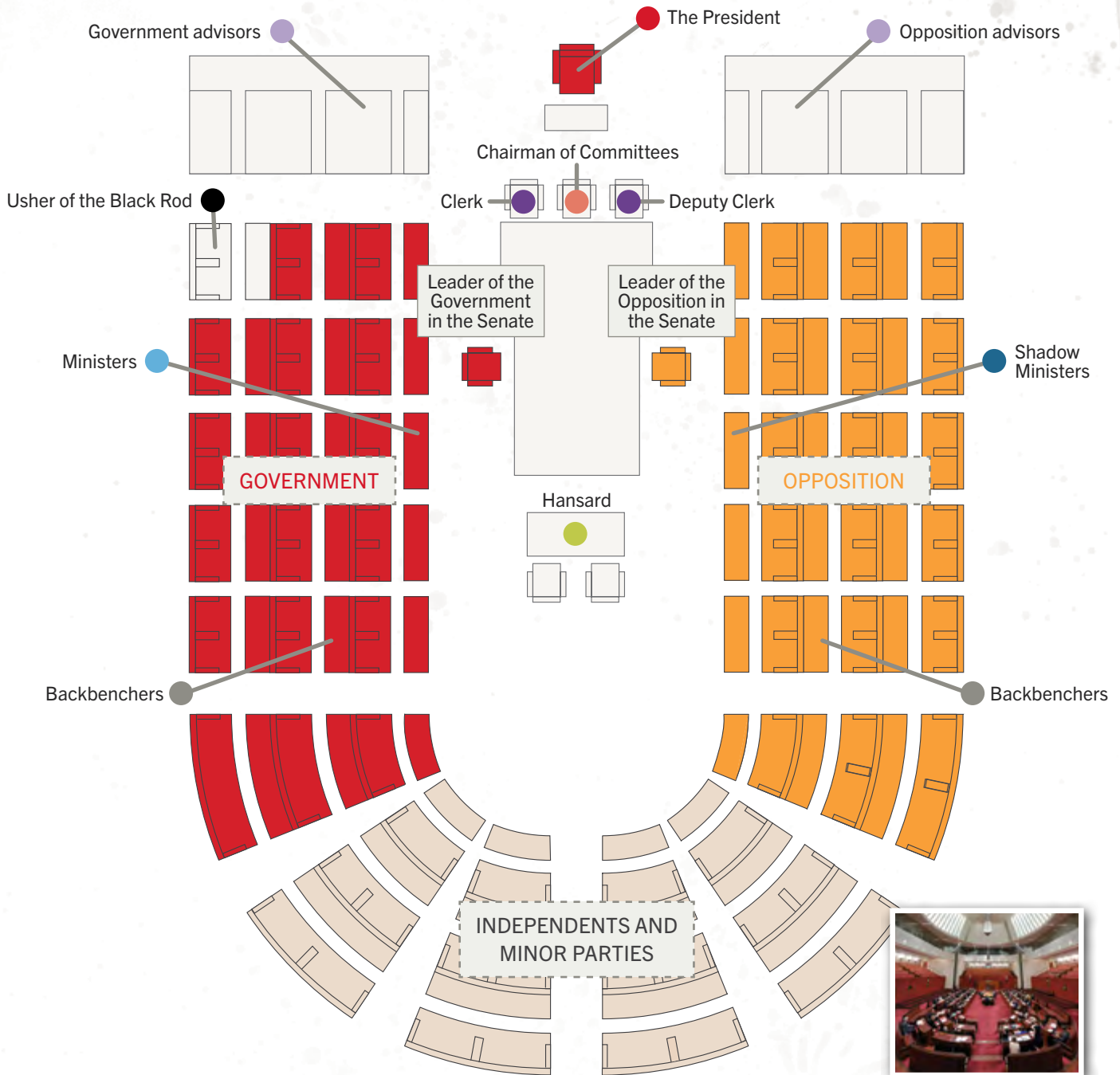
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



- **The Speaker** is a member of the House of Representatives and, among other things, is responsible for the orderly running of the chamber.
- **The President** is a senator and, among other things, is responsible for the orderly running of the chamber.

- The **Chairman of Committees**, who is also Deputy President of the Senate, runs the chamber during committee of the whole. At this time, the Senate can consider a bill in more detail, including amendments, or changes, to the bill.
- A **minister** is in charge of a government department that puts law into action.

SENATE



- **Shadow ministers** 'shadow', or look closely at, the actions of government ministers.
- **Backbenchers** are members of parliament who are not ministers or shadow ministers.
- **The Clerk** is the top level non-elected officer in each chamber. The Clerk and Deputy Clerk record chamber decisions and advise members of parliament about chamber rules.

- The **Serjeant-at-Arms** is a non-elected officer who assists the Speaker to maintain order and helps to run the chamber.
- **The Usher of the Black Rod** is a non-elected officer who assists the President to maintain order and helps to run the chamber.
- **Government advisors** give advice to ministers. **Opposition advisors** give advice to shadow ministers.

Parliament at work

Representation

Federal Parliament represents all Australians. Each member of parliament represents, or speaks up about, the concerns and views of their constituents (the people in their electorate or state/territory).

Members of parliament might argue for or against a bill (proposed law), or make statements and ask questions in the Parliament. They can present signed petitions (requests) to the Parliament on behalf of their constituents. As well, they can speak to ministers and government departments about issues affecting their constituents.

Members of parliament also represent Australians by making decisions on their behalf. Decisions are made in Parliament by voting on bills and proposals put forward by ministers and other members of parliament. In order to be passed by Parliament a bill or proposal needs the support of the majority.

Members of parliament can speak freely on your behalf in the Parliament because they are protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that legal action can't be taken against them for anything they say or do in Parliament. Freedom of speech allows the Parliament to debate and inquire into any matters in a detailed and open way.



The Prime Minister, the Hon Tony Abbott MP



Members of parliament speak on behalf of Australians

GET THIS...

Members of parliament can 'cross the floor', which means voting against the decisions of their party. This is rare because of strong party loyalty. In the past, crossing the floor was more common. Senator Reg Wright, who served in Parliament from 1950 until 1978, crossed the floor a record 150 times!

Political parties

Most members of parliament belong to a political party and are elected to Parliament as a member of that party. A political party is a group of people who share similar ideas about what they believe are the best policies and actions needed to run the country. Party members will then work together to gain the support of the public and Parliament for these policies.

Political parties aim to have enough of their members elected to Parliament to form government. At present the majority of members of parliament come from two major political party groups. Minor parties and Independents are also represented in the Parliament.

To see the current composition of the Australian Parliament, go to Parliament NOW:

www.peo.gov.au/learning/parliament-now

Forming government

After a federal election, the government is formed by the political party or coalition of parties with the support of the majority of members in the House of Representatives.

To stay in power, the government must keep the support of more than half of the 150 members (that is, at least 76). The government does not need a majority in the Senate to form government.

The Prime Minister is a member of parliament and the leader of the government. The Australian people do not vote directly for the Prime Minister. Rather, the Prime Minister is chosen as leader by members of the government and sits in the House of Representatives.

Some members of the government are selected to be ministers. Usually, about 20 ministers are members of the House of Representatives and about 10 are senators.

Executive government

The Prime Minister and ministers make up a group called the 'ministry' or the 'executive government'. The executive makes decisions about how the country should be run and administers (carries out) laws made by the Parliament.

The executive also suggests ideas for new laws and proposes changes to current laws which it introduces into the Parliament as bills. Ministers are given an area of responsibility known as a 'portfolio'. They are usually in charge of a government department, which looks after areas such as foreign affairs or health.

Opposition

The opposition is the largest party (or coalition) that is not in government. The opposition wants voters to see it as the alternative government. It sets out ideas and plans for how it would govern the country and explains why it would do a better job than the current government.

The opposition must be ready to form government if it gains the support of the majority of members in the House of Representatives following a federal election.

Crossbench

Forming a majority in either chamber can require the support of minor parties and Independents, who are referred to as the 'crossbench'. This gives the crossbench a role in decision-making and in scrutinising the work of the government.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Parliament sits for about 70 days a year. Members of parliament spend some of the sitting period in the chambers, but have many other demands on their time.

For example, they participate in parliamentary committees (which investigate proposed laws and other issues), assist people from their electorate or state/territory, attend party meetings and keep up-to-date with current issues.

Business is conducted in each chamber for an average of eleven hours a day, four days a week. However, it is not unusual for members of parliament to begin their day with a breakfast meeting at 7am and to end their day at 10pm or later.

Members of parliament work similar hours in their electorate or state/territory when Parliament is not sitting. For example, they meet with community organisations, visit schools, make presentations, attend local party meetings, handle enquiries from their constituents and speak to the media.

Sample diary of an MP – Tuesday 14 March

7am – BREAKFAST MEETING

with schools about junk food in school canteens

8am – MEET WITH ADVISORS

to review the day's schedule

9am – PARTY MEETING

to discuss policies and prepare for Question Time

10am – OFFICE

to read notes and prepare questions for committee hearing into cyber crime

10.30am – SPEECH IN CHAMBER

on the government's bill to ban junk food in school canteens

11am – COMMITTEE HEARING

into pressures faced by secondary school students

12pm – WORKING LUNCH

with Year 10 students from my electorate to hear about how they juggle study and part-time work

1pm – MEETING

with media advisor to prepare for radio interview this afternoon

2pm – QUESTION TIME IN THE HOUSE

to ask the government about its policy on junk food advertising

3.30pm – MEETING

with a constituent from my electorate about an immigration issue

4pm – MEETING

with a lobby group from the food industry to hear its views on the junk food bill

4.30pm – COMMITTEE HEARING

to question witness groups about cyber crime

6pm – RADIO INTERVIEW

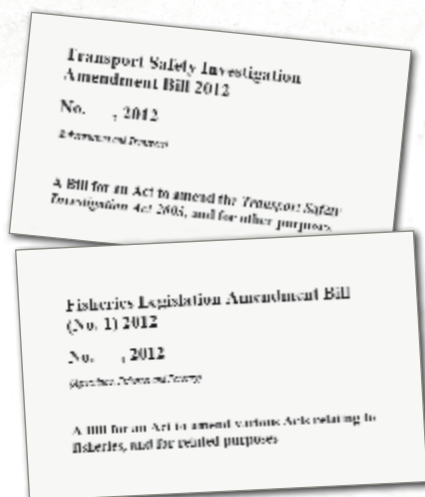
about banning junk food advertising on television

6pm – SPEAK AT DINNER FUNCTION

hosted by the Australian Film and Television School

8pm – PRESENT PETITION TO THE HOUSE

on behalf of constituents calling on the government to ban junk food advertising during children's programs on television



Examples of some bills



Debating an issue in the Senate

GET THIS...

The Clerk reads the title of the bill aloud when it is introduced, and if it passes the second and third reading stages. This practice dates back to the early days of the British Parliament before printing and literacy were widespread. The Clerk would read not just the title but the entire contents of the bill.

Making laws

One of the main roles of the Parliament is to consider and make new laws and change old ones. Laws are rules that help manage our society.

Some laws tell us how to play our part as responsible citizens, for example laws about voting and taxation. Other laws are made to look after people, such as laws providing money for health or education. Laws are often made in response to an issue, such as supporting people with a disability.

Introducing bills

A proposal for a new law is called a 'bill'. Most bills are introduced into the Parliament by the government, although any member of parliament can propose a bill.

Bills introduced by non-government members of parliament are known as private members' or private senators' bills. Approximately 180 government and 20 private bills are introduced in Parliament each year. Of these, about 90 per cent become law.

Bills may begin in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, except for some money and taxation bills which must be introduced in the House of Representatives. About 90 per cent of bills begin in the House of Representatives, where most ministers sit.

Passing bills

A bill must go through several stages before it can become a law. After a bill is introduced into Parliament, members of parliament have the opportunity to debate and vote on it.

A bill becomes a law if it is passed by both the House of Representatives and Senate in identical form (using exactly the same words) and has been assented to (signed) by the Governor-General.

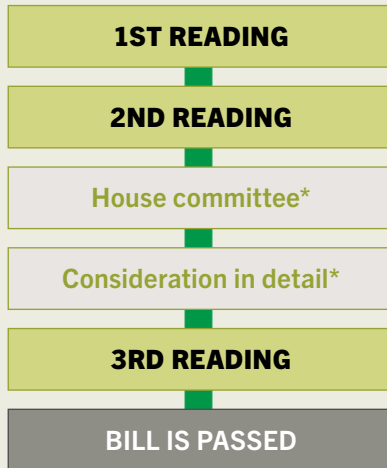
A bill can only be passed if a majority in each chamber agrees. The stages a bill goes through in each chamber are set out in the diagram to the right.

Amending bills

After examining a bill in detail, the Senate or the House of Representatives may decide to make amendments (changes) to a bill to improve it. These amendments are also debated and voted on. Any member of parliament can suggest amendments. If the government does not have a majority in either chamber, it may have to negotiate with Independents, minor parties or the opposition and make amendments to the bill so it will be passed.

Usual stages of a bill

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



- **1st reading**—the bill is introduced to the House of Representatives.
- **2nd reading**—members debate and vote on the main idea of the bill.
- **House committee***—public inquiry into the bill and reporting back to the House.
- **Consideration in detail***—members discuss the bill in detail, including any changes to the bill.
- **3rd reading**—members vote on the bill in its final form.
- The **bill is passed** in the House of Representatives and sent to the Senate.



SENATE



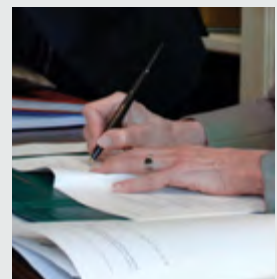
- **1st reading**—the bill is introduced to the Senate.
- **2nd reading**—senators debate and vote on the main idea of the bill.
- **Senate committee***—public inquiry into the bill and reporting back to the Senate.
- **Committee of the whole***—senators discuss the bill in detail, including any changes to the bill.
- **3rd reading**—senators vote on the bill in its final form.
- The **bill is passed** in the Senate.



GOVERNOR-GENERAL



- **Royal Assent**—The Governor-General signs the bill.
- **Bill becomes an Act of Parliament**—a law for Australia.



* optional stage

Accountability

It is the job of the Parliament, and in particular the opposition, minor parties and Independents, to scrutinise (closely examine) the work of the government.

The Parliament holds the government to account by checking that the government's decisions are in the best interests of the nation. Parliament uses several methods to make sure the government explains what it is doing and why.

Parliamentary committees

Parliamentary committees are set up by the Senate and the House of Representatives to investigate bills (proposed laws) or issues in more detail than is possible in the chamber. This helps the Parliament make better informed decisions.

Most members of parliament, except ministers and parliamentary secretaries, serve on committees. A parliamentary committee is usually made up of six to ten government and non-government members of parliament.

The committee invites the public, experts and officials to make a written statement outlining their views about the bill or issue. It then might ask some of these people to appear before it to answer questions and provide further information. Next, the committee writes a formal report which is presented to the Parliament. The report may suggest changes to a bill or make other recommendations.

Committees also check on the work of the government to make sure that it is doing its job properly. For example, Senate estimates hearings, also known as 'estimates', allow senators to scrutinise how the government is spending taxpayers' money. They also focus on the government's future spending plans. Under detailed questioning from non-government senators, ministers and department officials may reveal details about government practice that have previously not been public. Estimates hearings may lead to improvements in the way government departments are run, as well as reminding the government that it is accountable to Australians for its policies and actions.

All estimates, and most committee hearings, are open to the media and the public and are broadcast live.



A minister and senior public servants face questioning at a Senate estimates hearing



The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator the Hon Penny Wong

GET THIS...

The media keeps the public informed about Parliament and in particular the performance of the government. The media can play an important part in scrutinising the government by investigating or questioning its decisions and actions.

Question Time

During Question Time, the Prime Minister and ministers are asked to explain government decisions and actions. Question Time takes place in both the House of Representatives and Senate at 2pm every Monday to Thursday when Parliament is sitting, and runs for about one hour.

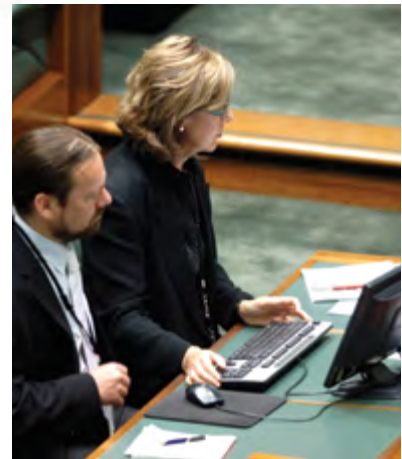
The opposition, minor parties and Independents use Question Time to raise important issues, and to make sure that the decisions made by the government are in the best interests of the nation. The opposition may also ask questions aimed at highlighting weaknesses in the government's performance and at presenting itself as an alternative government.

In contrast, members of the government ask ministers questions that give them a chance to show that the government is doing a good job of running the country. Question Time also allows ministers to talk about urgent matters and to display their political skills.

Question Time is often the liveliest part of the sitting day. It is broadcast on national television, radio and the internet and is widely reported in the media. This gives the public an opportunity to observe Parliament at work.



A member of parliament questions the government



Hansard reporters in the House of Representatives

Public records

Official records are kept of what is said and done in the Parliament. These records include Hansard, *Journals of the Senate* and *Votes and Proceedings*. Anyone can check these records to see what is being said about a bill or issue, and to find out about decisions made by the Parliament. These records are an important way of keeping Parliament open and accountable to the people.

Hansard is an edited transcript (written record) of what is said in Parliament. It is named after the family who produced the record of British parliamentary debates from 1812 to 1889. Hansards for the Senate and House of Representatives are available on the internet on the morning following each sitting day. Hansards of committee hearings can also be accessed online.

The *Journals of the Senate* and *Votes and Proceedings* are legal records and provide the most accurate information about the activities of the Senate and House of Representatives. Unlike Hansard, they record what is done by each chamber rather than what is said by individual members of parliament. For example, they list each vote that is held and how each member of parliament voted.

The *Journals of the Senate* can be viewed online at: www.aph.gov.au/Senate/journals
Votes and Proceedings are available to view online at: www.tinyurl.com/VotesProceedings

www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Publications

Get involved

Parliament and you

The laws made in Parliament affect Australians every day. For example, Parliament has made laws about:

- wearing seatbelts and bike helmets
- how much it costs to post a letter
- classifying films and TV shows
- listing ingredients on packaged food.

Voting

All Australians 18 years and over have the right to vote. You can enrol to vote once you turn 17 so you are ready to have your say. By voting, you choose who you want to be represented by in Parliament.

With the right to vote comes the responsibility to make an informed decision. You can do that by:

- learning about our parliamentary system
- finding out about candidates and what they stand for
- figuring out if you agree with the decisions made by your representatives.



Bondi polling place – every vote counts

Committees and you

If a committee investigates an issue you feel strongly about you can let them know what you think. Anyone who takes part in a committee is considered to be protected by parliamentary privilege. This means they can speak freely without any action being taken against them. Public input into committees is important; it is one way Parliament can learn about community attitudes and concerns, and work towards fixing problems.

Committees invite people to send them a written submission (statement) or to attend a public hearing (meeting) to outline their views. For example, high school students sent submissions to a committee investigating the pressures of juggling school and casual work. The committee then invited the students to a public hearing to discuss their experiences. Committee hearings are held in towns and cities across Australia, as well as at Parliament House in Canberra.

**There are ways
you can get involved
in Parliament's
decision-making**

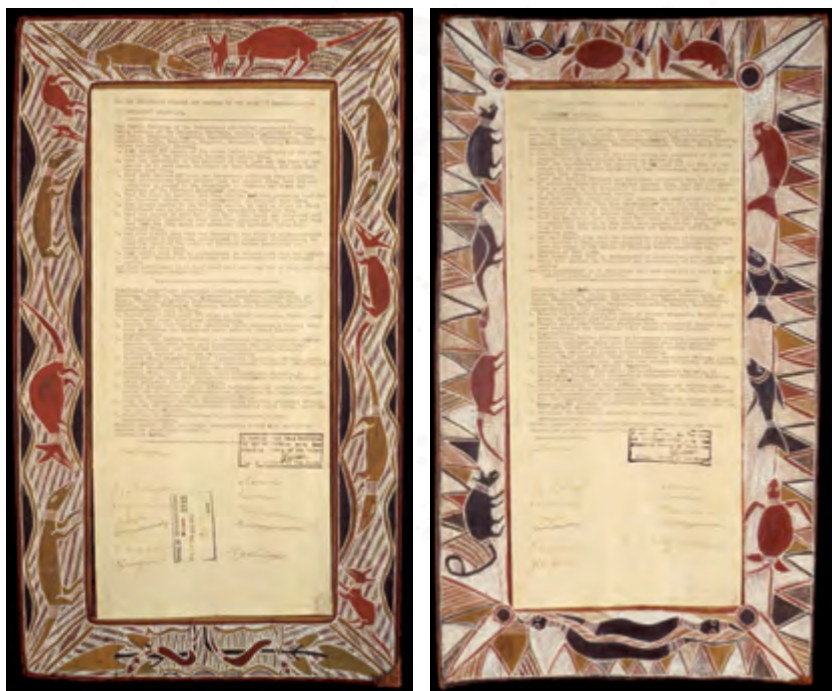


Taking Parliament to the people: a Senate committee hearing at Balgo in the Kimberley, Western Australia

Petitions

A petition is a request by a group of citizens for Parliament to take action to solve a particular problem. It is the oldest and most direct way that citizens can draw attention to a problem and ask the Parliament to help them.

The public can influence decisions made in Parliament by starting or signing a petition. Members of parliament present petitions on behalf of the public. Each chamber has rules about how a petition can be presented.



The Yirrkala petition, written in English and Yolgnu languages, and decorated with Aboriginal bark paintings

One of the most famous set of petitions was presented to the House of Representatives in 1963 on behalf of the Yolgnu people of Yirrkala in the Northern Territory. The Yolgnu people asked the Parliament to recognise their traditional land on the Gove Peninsula in Arnhem Land, which was under threat from mining. As a result, the Parliament established a committee to investigate the issue.

Some unusual petitions have been presented to the Senate, including one that was written on a jacket and continued on a roll of cloth. This petition related to the textile, clothing and footwear industries and was presented on 2 April 1992.

How else can I get involved?

- Participate in online forums and blogs on current issues.
- Join a youth parliament in your state or territory.
- Visit Parliament House and see the House of Representatives and the Senate in action.
- Organise and speak at a public meeting.
- Speak or write to a member of parliament about an issue.
- Write letters to newspapers or call talk-back radio.
- Watch Parliament on television, or via the internet at www.aph.gov.au

GET THIS...

Every year over one hundred petitions are presented to Parliament. The petition with the greatest number of signatures – 792 985 – called on the government not to increase taxes on beer. It was presented to the House in 2000.

Get more!

Parliamentary Education Office (PEO)
Online resources – www.peo.gov.au

Parliament NOW

Up-to-date information about the current Parliament, including who's who, latest news and statistics.

www.peo.gov.au/learning/parliament-now

Fact Sheets:

The Fact Sheets give more information on topics covered in *Get Parliament*.

www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets

Closer Look

Closer Look provides a detailed exploration of several themes in *Get Parliament*, such as federation and the three levels of law-making.

www.peo.gov.au/learning/closer-look

Federal Parliament History Timeline

Investigate the milestones to find out how the work of the Parliament has influenced the development of Australia since federation.

timeline.peo.gov.au

Multimedia

Check out the PEO's videos, images, games and quizzes.

www.peo.gov.au/multimedia

Assignment Assistant

Send an email to Assignment Assistant to get help with your projects or homework on Parliament.

assignmentassistant.peo.gov.au

Online resources just for teachers –
www.peo.gov.au/teaching/

Role-play Lesson Plans

Transform your classroom into a parliamentary chamber with role-plays that explore the processes of law-making, representation and scrutiny in the Parliament.

Mini Role-play Lesson Plans

Explore some of the different ways that members of parliament represent the people and hold the government to account. These mini role-plays provide a quick introduction to the day to day work of the Parliament.

Parliamentary Lesson Plans

Designed for middle to upper secondary teachers, the Parliamentary Lesson Plans investigate Parliament through interactive and student-focused activities. The series includes 12 lessons across six themes: Political Movements, Representation, Transparency, Executive Government, Legislation and The Constitution.

Get Parliament

Order additional copies of *Get Parliament*.



Get Parliament Activity Sheets

You can download activity sheets to use with this booklet.



[www.peo.gov.au/
resources/
get-parliament.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/resources/get-parliament.html)

Other resources

Visit www.peo.gov.au/resources to see the full range available, including:

Parliament in Pictures

A set of ten A2 posters and a classroom guide which introduces teachers and students to the federal Parliament. \$20.00 per individual set (includes postage and GST).

Parliament of Wizards

A set of innovative teaching materials on CD-ROM. Students take on the role of wizards and create an imaginary parliament. One complimentary copy available per school.

Pocket Constitution

A pocket-sized edition of *Australia's Constitution*. \$2.00 per copy (includes postage and GST).

Role-play the Parliament: a teacher's guide

A colourful resource designed for teachers who want to run a parliamentary role-play in the classroom. One complimentary copy available per school.

Role-play at Parliament House

This one hour program is available to primary, secondary and tertiary students and accompanying teachers. To book please contact the office of the Serjeant-at-Arms at Parliament House—**free call 1800 646 337**.

More links

Parliament of Australia – www.aph.gov.au

Australian Electoral Commission – www.aec.gov.au



 www.peo.gov.au/resources

Acknowledgments

Page 2:

Barriers between Brothers, cartoon courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

Page 3:

Combine Australia cartoon, photo by Dragi Markovic courtesy of the National Museum of Australia.

Federation celebrations, photos courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

Page 4:

Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1900: Original Public Record Copy (1900), courtesy of the Parliament House Art Collection, Art Services Parliament House.

Page 5:

“The West Australian” Record Board, Federal Poll 1900, photo courtesy of the State Library, Western Australia.

Referendum ballot paper 1967, courtesy of the National Archives of Australia.

Page 8–9:

Ballot papers, courtesy of the Australian Electoral Commission.

Page 18:

Senate committee in WA, photo courtesy of the Senate Research section.


Bondi polling place, photo courtesy of the Australian Electoral Commission.

Page 19:

Yirrkala artists, Dhuwa moiety, Yirrkala Bark Petition 14.8.1963, 46.9 x 21cm, natural ochres on bark, ink on paper, House of Representatives, Canberra.

Yirrkala artists, Yirritja moiety, Yirrkala Bark Petition 28.8.1963, 46.9 x 21cm, natural ochres on bark, ink on paper, House of Representatives, Canberra.

All other images courtesy of Auspic and the PEO.

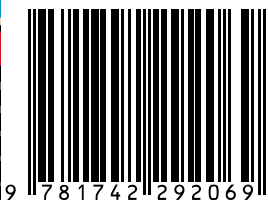


Get Parliament is produced by the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO). This material has been developed for use by upper primary and secondary teachers and students.

For more information about Parliament, visit the PEO website **www.peo.gov.au** and the Parliament of Australia website **www.aph.gov.au**



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