



Australian Government

You and Your Government Information Kit



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The three levels of Government in Australia

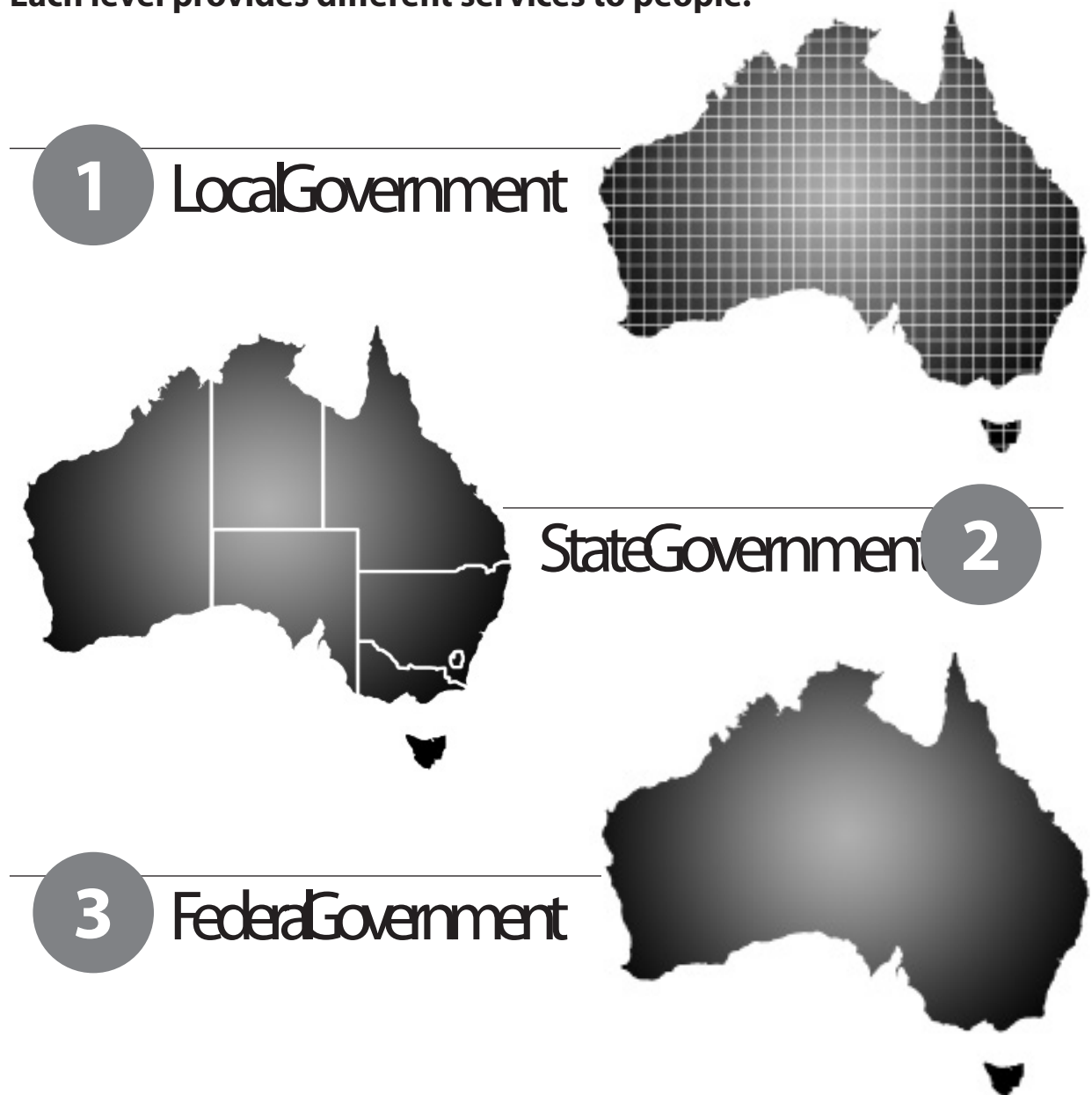
Every day in Australia, we make lots of decisions to satisfy our needs. These can be made by one person or a group. Families, schools and clubs make decisions, which we call rules.

Rules are made by our Parliaments to keep order and to allow fairness in our community. These rules are called laws. It is the job of the

Government to carry out the laws made by Parliament.

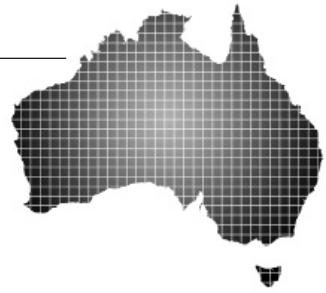
Decisions need to be made to solve many problems that arise on local communities, states or territories and in the nation as a whole. These decisions are made by groups of people who are elected by citizens living in a particular area.

There are three levels of Government in Australia. Each level provides different services to people:



1

Local Government



The City of Blacktown is divided into 5 Wards and has three Councillors per Ward. City of Penrith is divided into 3 Wards and has 5 Councillors per Ward. Councillors are elected for a terms of four years. **Note:** The term "Councillor" superseded the term "Alderman" as part of the new Local Government Act, 1993.

- to exercise such other functions of the Council as the Council determines
- to preside at meetings of the Council to carry out the civic and ceremonial functions of the Mayoral Office

What is the role of a Councillor?

1. The role of a Councillor is, as a member of the governing body of the Council:

- to direct and control the affairs of the Council in accordance with this the Local Government Act 1993
- to participate in the optimum allocation of the Council's resources for the benefit of the area
- to play a key role in the creation and review of the Council's policies and objectives and criteria relating to the exercise of the Council's regulatory functions to review the performance of the Council and its delivery of services, and the management plans and revenue policies of the Council.

2. The role of a Councillor is, as an elected person:

- to represent the interests of the residents and ratepayers to provide leadership and guidance to the community
- to facilitate communication between the community and the Council.

The Mayor is elected by the Councillors annually each year.

What is the role of the Mayor?

The role of the Mayor is:

- to exercise, in cases of necessity, the policy-making functions of the governing body of the Council between meetings of the Council

Local Government Responsibilities

Local Governments service the needs of local communities. Local councils make decisions on local, town or city matters through laws called by-laws.

There are about 700 local governments in Australia. These may be known as municipalities, shires, boroughs, towns or cities depending on where you live. Councillors or Alderman are elected to represent the people who live in that community. The Mayor or Shire President leads the council or shire.

Local Government taxes (called rates) are collected from land owners. These, along with money grants from the State and Federal Government, pay for the following local Government services:

- Street signs and traffic controls
- Child care centres
- Drains and footpaths
- Sports grounds
- Setting and collecting rates
- Libraries
- Animal control
- Rubbish collection
- Buildings and permits
- Swimming pools

2 State Government



Each State or Territory has its own Government and Parliament. Members of the State Parliament are elected to represent each state and to make laws about state matters. The Premier is the leader of the State Government and the Chief Minister the leader of Territory Government's.

Each of the States, except Queensland, has two houses of Parliament. The Lower House is called the Legislative Assembly or the House of Assembly. The Upper House is called the Legislative Council. The Parliaments of each Territory have only one house, called a Legislative Assembly.

State Government Responsibilities

State Governments raise money from taxes on goods and services, and they also receive grants from the Federal Government.

Some services for which the state governments are responsible include:

- Hospitals
- Housing
- Schools
- Railways
- Community Services
- Motor vehicle registration
- Forestry
- Wildlife protection
- Police
- Fire brigade and ambulance services
- Roads

3 Federal Government



The Federal Parliament makes laws for all Australians. The Federal Government is located in Canberra. There are two houses of Parliament: the House of Representatives and the Senate. All Australians vote for Members and Senators to represent them in Parliament. The Prime Minister, who is a member of the House of Representatives, is the leader of the Federal Government.

Federal Government Responsibilities

The Constitution gives the Federal Government more powers than the State and Local Governments in a range of specific areas. If the State and Federal Government make conflicting laws, the Federal Law is the one that is recognised.

Some services for which the Federal Government is responsible for include:

- Employment
- Pensions and family support
- Defence forces
- Immigration and customs
- Passports
- Income and company taxes
- Imports and exports
- Control of television and radio
- Airports and air safety
- Posts and telecommunications

The role of your local State Member or Federal Member of Parliament

How to become a Member of Parliament

Any member of the community may seek to become a Member of Parliament by either independent nomination, or by becoming a member of a political party and then standing for pre-selection. This process involves being selected from other candidates by a selection panel of a particular political party to represent that party in Parliament.

People also choose to stand as independent candidates which means they are not affiliated with any particular party.

The Local Member in the Electorate

Members of Parliament work locally for the people in the area that they represent. The people who live and/or work in an electorate are often referred to as "constituents". As the constituents' representative in Parliament, an MP receives and deals with many requests for assistance.

An MP attends to the concerns and problems of local organisations and businesses. All Members have regular dealings with government departments. In some cases they can be more effective than a member of the public when dealing with departments as they have access to the Ministers responsible for those departments.

During the day, in the evenings and at weekends Members are expected to attend many important meetings and functions of all kinds within their constituencies. These include meetings relating to the community, schools, business organisations, charities and social or sporting clubs. MPs may chair local meetings, participate in seminars and act as patron to many organisations.

A Member of Parliament can be either a Government Minister responsible for a portfolio eg. Transport, a Shadow Minister, or a backbencher. A local Member who is not in either the Ministry of the Government or the shadow Ministry of the Opposition is called a "backbencher".

A local Member who is called upon to become a Minister and take responsibility for a portfolio eg. Health, becomes a Member of the Cabinet. They continue to represent constituents at the same time.

Being a Member of Parliament is a full-time job and every Member of Parliament is bound to attend the sittings of the House unless leave is granted by the House. A Member of Parliament's seat becomes vacant if the Member remains absent for one whole session without leave being granted.

All citizens should feel free to contact their local Member of Parliament with any problem or request, as they are the voice of the people in Australia.

The Constitution and Federation

The Australian Constitution is a set of rules that say how the country should be run.

Before 1901 Australia was one continent with six colonies (not a nation). In the 1890s the colonies came together to try to form a new Federal Government. Eventually the colonies agreed on a new set of rules – *the Constitution*.

The people of the colonies voted to accept this new Constitution. With the help of the British Parliament, the nation known as the

Commonwealth of Australia came into existence on 1 January 1901. The colonies became states of Australia (and transferred some of their power to the Commonwealth Government) and a new Federal Australian Parliament was formed. This is known as the Australian Federation.

In 1911, the Commonwealth Government created the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. They are not states.



Other federations include the United States of America, Canada, Malaysia, Brazil, Germany and India

Changing the Constitution

Can the Constitution be changed?

Yes, the Constitution can be changed. Before the Constitution can be changed, a special vote called a referendum must take place. For this change to take place, there must be a majority of voters in a majority of states that must agree.

If there is a law that is passed by Parliament or a Government decision that is made which may not be in agreement with the Constitution, it is taken to the High Court. The High Court, which is made of 7 judges, decides the matter.

Has the Constitution been changed since 1901?

Yes, there has been 44 referendums since 1901. The Australian people have decided to change the Constitution 8 times.



Did you know?

Political parties were not recognised in the Constitution until 1977.

Some interesting Referenda since Federation

12 December 1906

Senate Elections

CARRIED



That both the House of Representatives and the Senate could go to an election together if this was convenient.

22 September 1951

Communists and Communism

NOT CARRIED



That Commonwealth Parliament could make laws in respect of communists and communism where this was necessary for the security of the nation.

27 May 1967

Aboriginal Rights

CARRIED



That the Constitution should not discriminate against Aboriginal people. At the same time this referendum sought to enact special laws for Aboriginal people.

21 May 1977

Retirement of Judges

CARRIED



That there should be set retiring ages for Federal Court Judges.

3 September 1988

Parliamentary Terms

NOT CARRIED



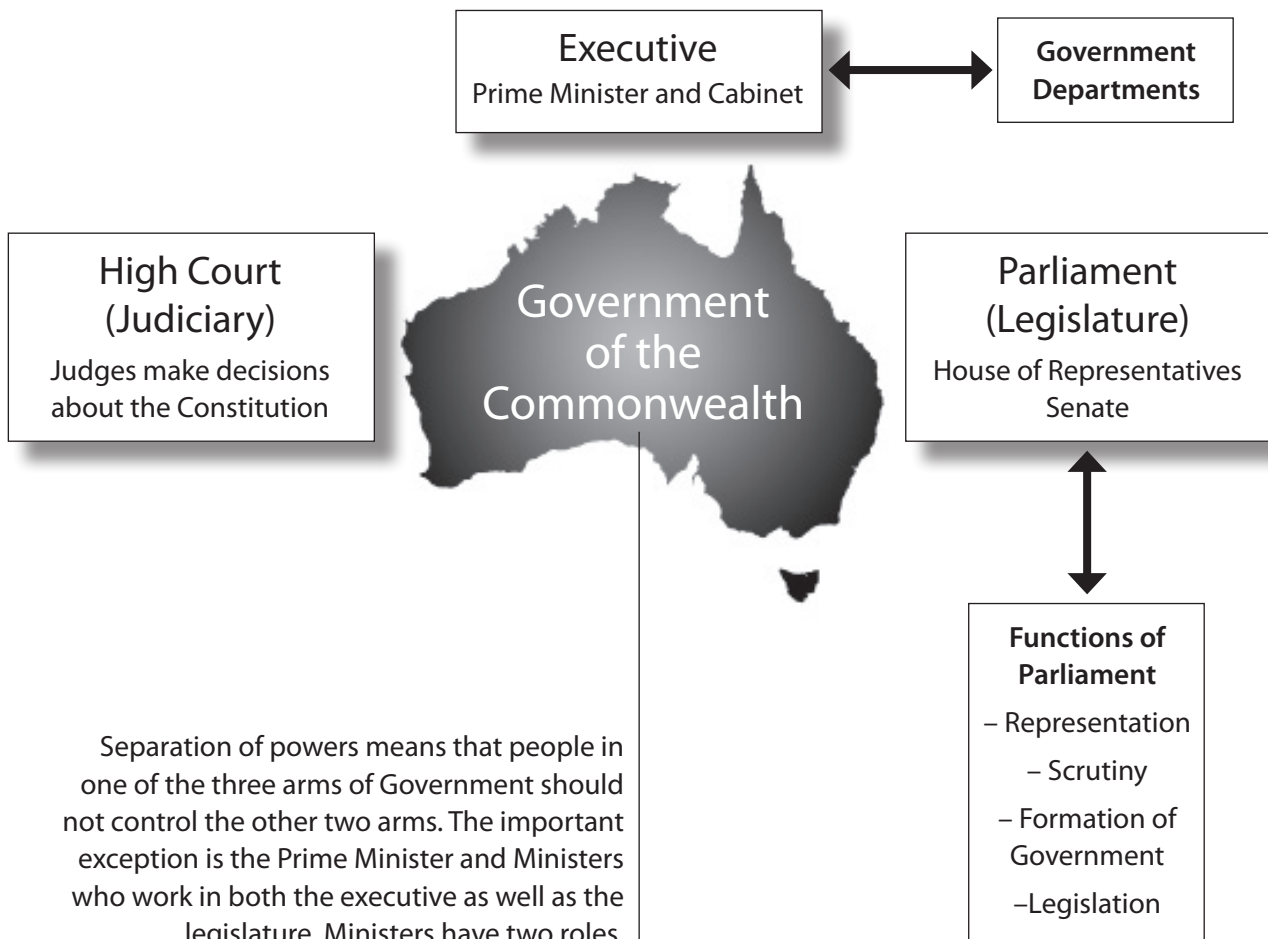
That maximum terms for members of both the House of Representatives and the Senate should be fixed to four years.

The Separation of Powers

Governing Australia needs lots of power. The Constitution says that this power is divided between three groups of people so they can balance each other. Each group checks the power of the other two. This division of power stops one person or group taking over all the power to govern Australia.



The **doctrine of the separation of powers** was described by Montesquieu in his L'Esprit des Lois in 1748. He said that a nation's liberty depended on the separation of the three types of power, **legislative, executive and judicial** with each having their own separate organisation. This policy is a very important part of the Australian Constitution.



What does Parliament do?

Parliament makes laws

The most important thing Parliament does is to make new laws and improve old ones.

Members of Parliament form the Government

The Government consists of Members of the political party which wins an election. This party has the majority of MPs in the House of Representatives. This party chooses the Ministers who run departments (e.g. the Department of Health).

All Ministers are Members of Parliament (MPs) and are therefore elected. Most Ministers sit in the House of Representatives although a few sit in the Senate. The Government introduces bills (laws) and runs the country from day to day.

The Government is sometimes called the Executive because it executes or carries out the laws made by the Parliament.

Parliament scrutinises the Government

The Government or Executive carries out the laws and other decisions of the Parliament.

The Parliament also gives power to the Government to do some things without prior approval from Parliament. However, the Parliament likes to check what the Government does.

The Parliament:

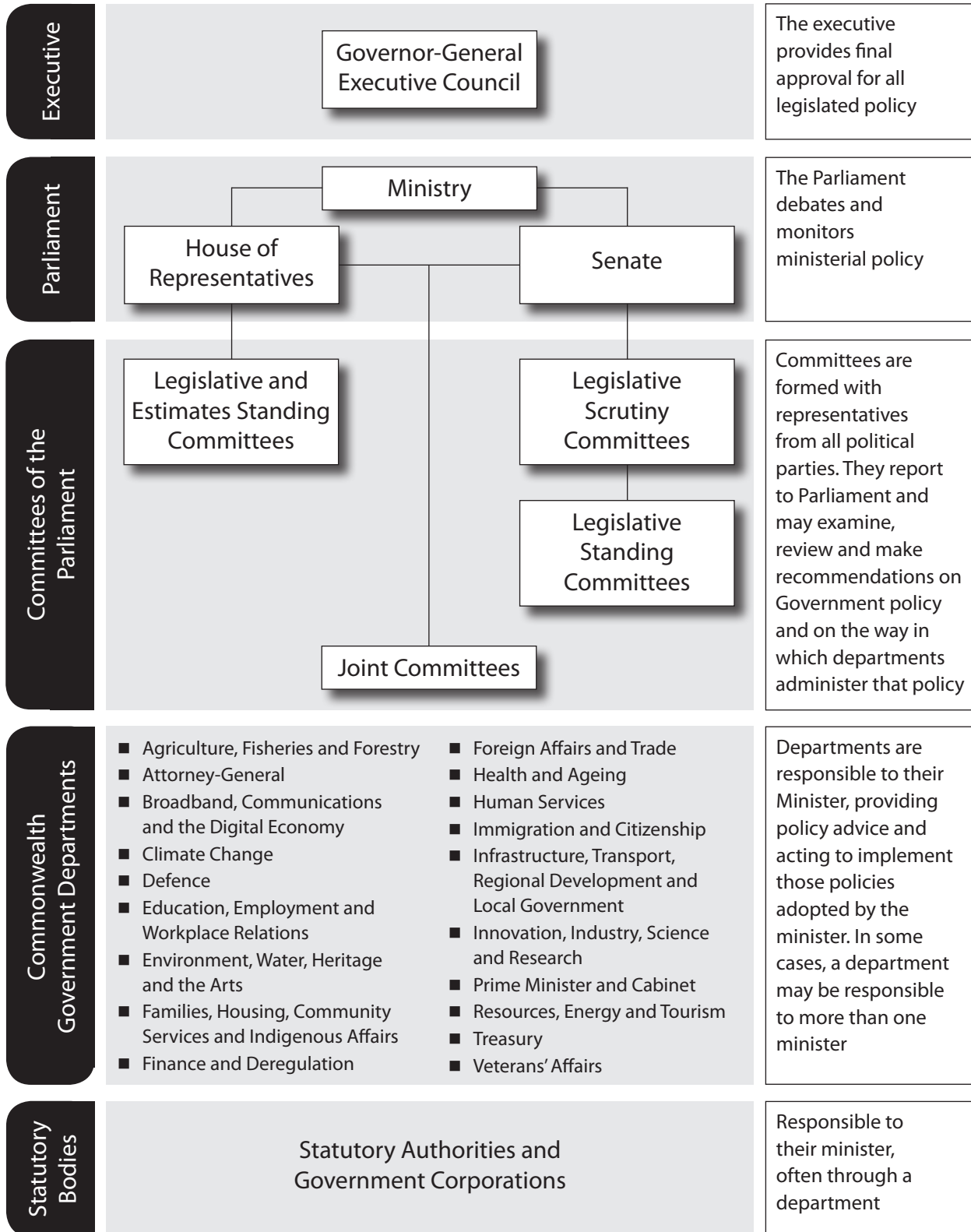
1. Asks the Government questions each day in Question Time in both the House of Representatives and the Senate,
2. Investigates how the Government spends money (Estimates Committees),
3. Sets up Parliamentary Committees to examine bills which the Government wants the Parliament to pass.

Parliament represents people

All members of Parliament are elected. Each Member of the House of Representatives is elected by and represents about 90,000 voters in an electorate. States with large populations have many MPs. For example, New South Wales has 50 MPs. Senators represent states. Voters in each state are represented by 12 Senators. Each territory has two Senators.

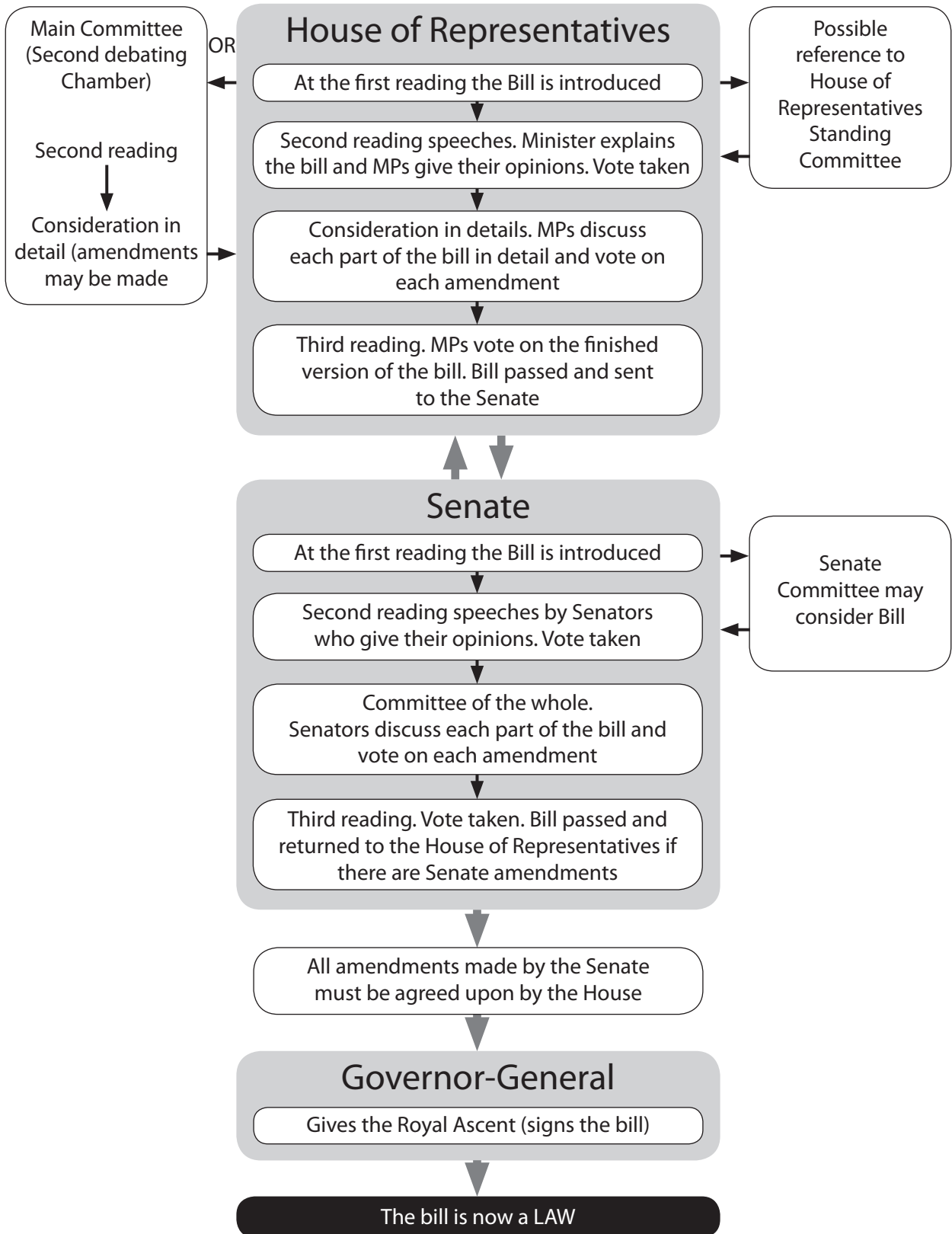
Accountability to Parliament

Ministers, as members of either the House of Representatives or the Senate, are accountable for their policies and the actions of their departments. The Parliamentary Committee system looks at both policies and actions and reports to the Parliament.



How does Parliament pass a bill?

A bill is a proposal for a new law. Parliament turns a bill into a law or Act of Parliament by voting the bill through the following stages.



Parliament House

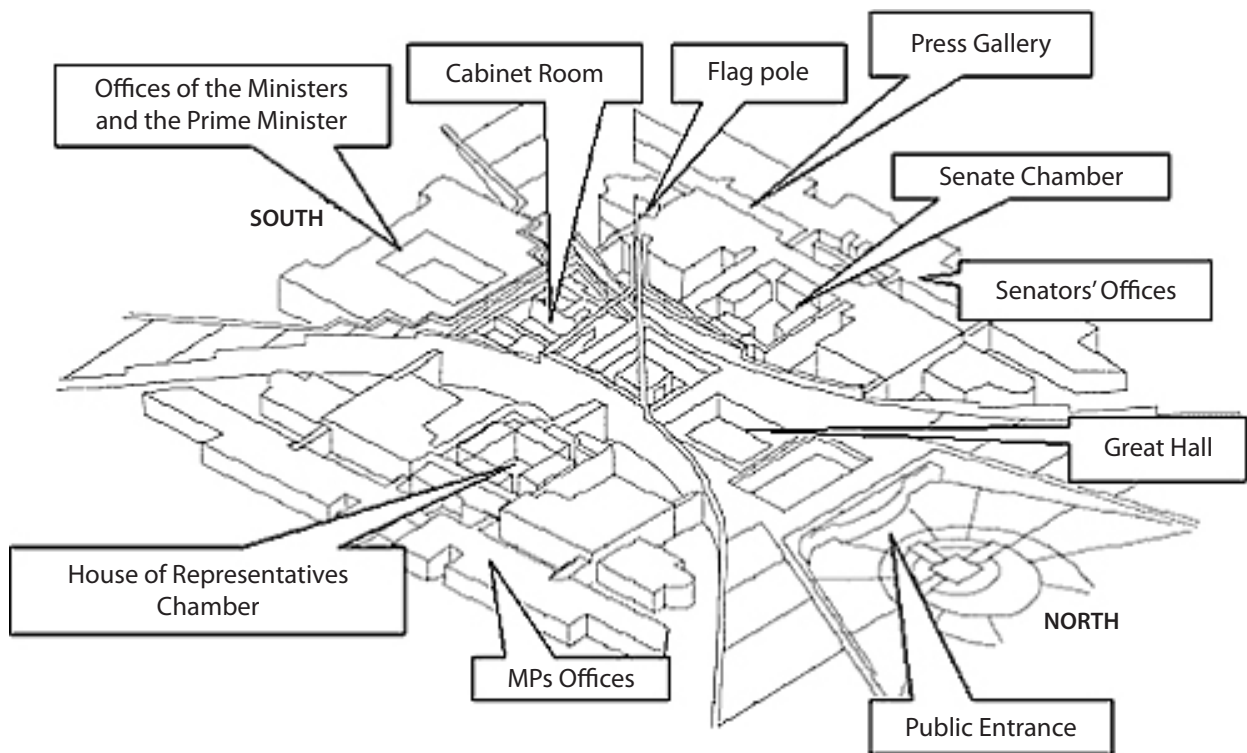
Parliaments are unique. They are not like office blocks or law courts or convention centres. The new Parliament house in Canberra was opened on 9 May 1988. The new Parliament House was designed so that the Members and Senators could do the following:

- 1 Represent people
- 2 Make laws
- 3 Scrutinise the Government, and
- 4 Form a Government from among the elected Parliamentarians.

There are many other activities that take place in a Parliament such as radio and television broadcasting from the press gallery and printing reports and other documents in the basement.

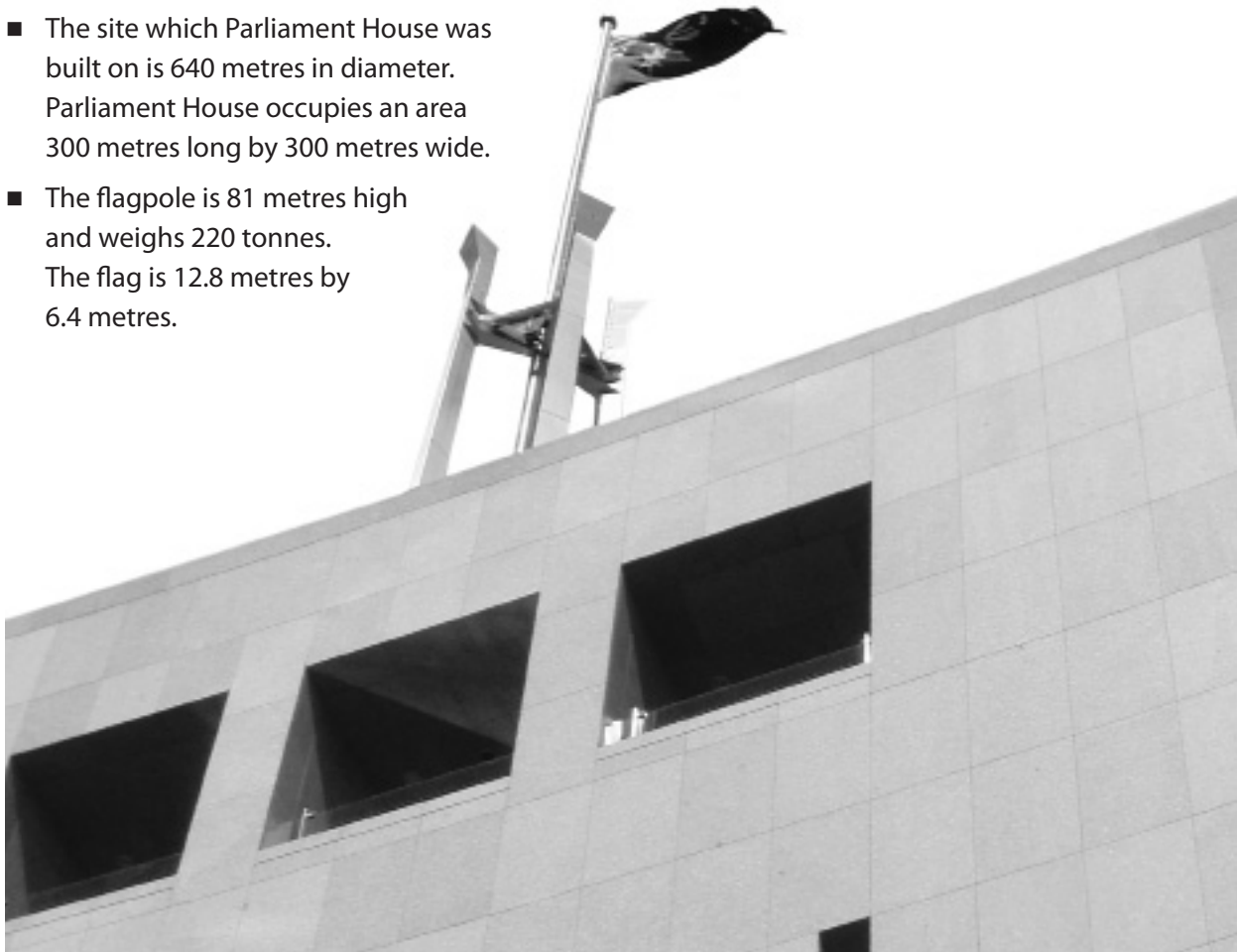
The dominant spaces in Parliament House are the House of Representatives and the Senate. In these two chambers, Members and Senators meet, debate bills, and represent the people from their electorates and states.

Below is a diagram showing the major areas found in Parliament House.



Facts about Parliament House

- Parliament House has 44 lifts, 34 000 light fittings, 5000 works of art, 2116 covered car spaces, 12 500 public address system speakers, 113 cleaners' closets, 1300 taps, 6000 division lights, 2000 clocks and 30 000 items of electronic equipment.
- When Parliament House is sitting, it has more than 3500 people working there.
- Parliament House was built to last 200 years and beyond and it is one of the largest buildings in the Southern Hemisphere.
- Parliament House has 750 000 square metres of plasterboard (the same amount used in 2000 houses).
- There are 24 000 granite slabs on the curved wall which, placed end to end, would stretch 46 kilometres.
- The new Parliament House has six times the floor space of the old Parliament House.
- The site which Parliament House was built on is 640 metres in diameter. Parliament House occupies an area 300 metres long by 300 metres wide.
- The flagpole is 81 metres high and weighs 220 tonnes. The flag is 12.8 metres by 6.4 metres.
- It took 300 000 cubic metres of concrete (enough to build 25 Opera Houses) and 24 000 tonnes of steel reinforcing (half as much steel used in the Sydney Harbour Bridge).
- Parliament House was designed by Mitchell/Giugola and Thorpe Architects. Their design was chosen from 329 entries from 28 countries.
- 10 000 workers from 50 different ethnic backgrounds were involved in the construction of Parliament House and its fittings.
- Parliament House was officially opened on 9 May 1988.
- The first sitting of Parliament in the building was held on 22 August 1988.



House of Representatives



The House of Representatives is sometimes called the People's House because Members are chosen to represent different parts of Australia, called electorates. Each electorate has about the same number of people in them. At each election, the people decide if their Member should be re-elected.

Why is the House of Representatives Green?

When the provisional Parliament House was built in 1927, the Australian Parliament adopted the parliamentary colours of green and red. As green was the traditional colour of the British House of Commons, it was used in the House of Representatives chamber and surroundings. In the new Parliament House a distinctive shade of green, which is more typical of the Australian landscape has been used to enhance our national identity.

How many Members are in the House of Representatives?

There are currently 150 Members of the House of Representatives.

What do the Members do?

A large proportion of their time is spent on electorate work where they come to know the people, local issues and problems. When Parliament is sitting, a Member's work in the chamber involves speaking on bills, important motions, ministerial statements and committee reports.

Members also attend community meetings and functions. They meet lobby groups, various community organisations, attend party meetings and many official functions.

Work on parliamentary committees is an important part of a members work. They:

- Conduct inquiries on bills and matters of national importance
- Collect information from experts, interest groups and witnesses
- Write reports

Senate



The Senate is sometimes called the House of Review because the job of the Senate is to review ideas for new laws that come from the House of Representatives. There are 76 Senators (12 for each state and 2 for each Territory). Senators are elected by a system called “proportional representation”.

This means that the number of seats that each party gets is decided by how many votes the political party gets in an election.

Why is the Senate Red?

Red is the colour used in the Senate, as it is the same colour used in the British House of Lords. The shade of red used in the Senate is more typical of that found in the Australian landscape.

How many members are in the Senate?

There are 76 Senators.

What do the Senators do?

Senators represent whole states and territories. A lot of the Senators work is focused on considering bills in details, debating current issues, committee reports, ministerial statements and papers tabled by Ministers.

Work on Parliamentary committees is an important part of Senator’s work. They:

- Conduct inquiries on bills and other important national matters
- Collect information from experts, interest groups and witnesses
- Write reports

Senators also meet lobby groups, various community organisations and attend party meetings and many official functions.

Who's Who in Federal Parliament

House of Representatives



Prime Minister
Julia Gillard



Speaker of the House of Representatives
Peter Slipper



Leader of the Opposition
Tony Abbott

Parties represented in the House of Representatives

Australian Labor Party	71	Liberal Party	45	The Greens	1
Independents	6	National Party	7		
Liberal National Party	20				

Senate



Leader of the Government (Senate)
Chris Evans



President of the Senate
John Hogg



Leader of the Opposition (Senate)
Eric Abetz

Parties represented in the Senate (effective 1 July 2011)

Australian Greens	9	Independent	1
Australian Labor Party	31	Liberal Party	28
Country Liberal Party	1	The Nationals	5
DLP	1		

Governor-General



Quentin Bryce

The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister is the leader of the Federal Government and Australia's National leader.

The Prime Minister:

- Is an elected Member of Parliament in the House of Representatives and represents the people of one electorate.
- Is elected by members of his/her political party to be the leader of that party.
- Forms the Government by recommending to the Governor General who should be the Cabinet Ministers.
- Recommends to the Governor General who should be appointed as Justices in the High Court, as ambassadors and other senior positions.
- Answers many of the questions during question time in the House of Representatives.
- Chairs cabinet meetings.
- Is the head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. This department coordinates the other departments.

- Decides when a Federal election is to be held.
- Represents Australia in national and international meetings and events.
- Recommends to the Monarch (the Queen) who should be the Governor-General.
- The Prime Minister attends Question Time in the House of Representatives every day.



Did you know?

The Prime Minister has two residences: The Lodge in Canberra and Kirribilli House in Sydney.



Did you know?

Jackson Park, Faulconbridge (Blue Mountains) has a corridor of Oak trees planted by all Australian Prime Ministers or their families. This is a living memorial of the leaders of Australia.

Presiding Officers

The Presiding Officers are the Speaker and the President. The Speaker is in charge of the House of Representatives and the President is in charge of the Senate (just like a chairperson running a meeting).

The President and the Speaker are both responsible for the general running of Parliament House including security, maintenance, the Parliamentary Library, Hansard and other essential services. The Presiding Officers are also involved in many ceremonial duties and they often represent the Parliament in meetings.

The Speaker

The Speaker makes sure that the rules of the House of Representatives (called the Standing Orders) are followed and that order is maintained. The Speaker is also the spokesperson for all the members of the House of Representatives in its dealings with the Government, the Senate and other Parliaments.

Selecting the Speaker

The Speaker is one of the 150 members of the House of Representatives. At the beginning of each new Parliament (after an election), the members all vote to choose a new Speaker. A secret ballot (vote) is used to choose someone who has a lot of Parliamentary experience.

The Speaker is impartial

The Speaker usually does not take part in debates. Even though the Speaker is a member of a political party, he or she should not take sides. The only time the Speaker can vote is when the votes are equal.

The President

The President makes sure that all of the rules of the Senate are followed and that debates run smoothly. The President is the spokesperson for the Senate and all its dealings with the Government, the House of Representatives, other Parliaments and authorities.

Selecting the President

The President is one of 76 Senators. The President is elected (using a secret ballot) on the first sitting day after a Senate Election.

Voting

The President has a vote just like any other Senator (unlike the Speaker for the House of Representatives, who doesn't get to vote). The President usually does not take part in a debate leading up to a vote.

The Governor-General

Australia's Head of State is Queen Elizabeth II. The Governor General represents the Queen. The Queen appoints the Governor-General to carry out duties on her behalf. The Prime Minister advises the Queen on who to appoint as Governor-General.

Powers of the Governor-General

The powers of the Governor-General are set out in the Constitution. The Governor-General is not involved in everyday political matters. The Governor-General is politically neutral which means that he or she works with whatever parties are in Government.

The Governor-General

- Signs bills passed by the Parliament (this is called the Royal Assent)
- Approves the appointment of senior judges and other officials.
- Signs rules and many other actions that Ministers must carry out.
- Is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The Minister for Defence formally advises the Governor-General on behalf of the Government.

Ceremonial Duties

A part of the role of being Governor-General involves carrying out ceremonial duties. These duties include giving the oath of office (called "swearing in") to Ministers, judges and other officials. The Governor-General also meets foreign heads of states and ambassadors. The Governor-General reads a speech at the opening of the new session of Parliament about what the Government will do.

Question Time

Question Time in the House of Representatives and the Senate is held at 2.00pm when Parliament is sitting on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

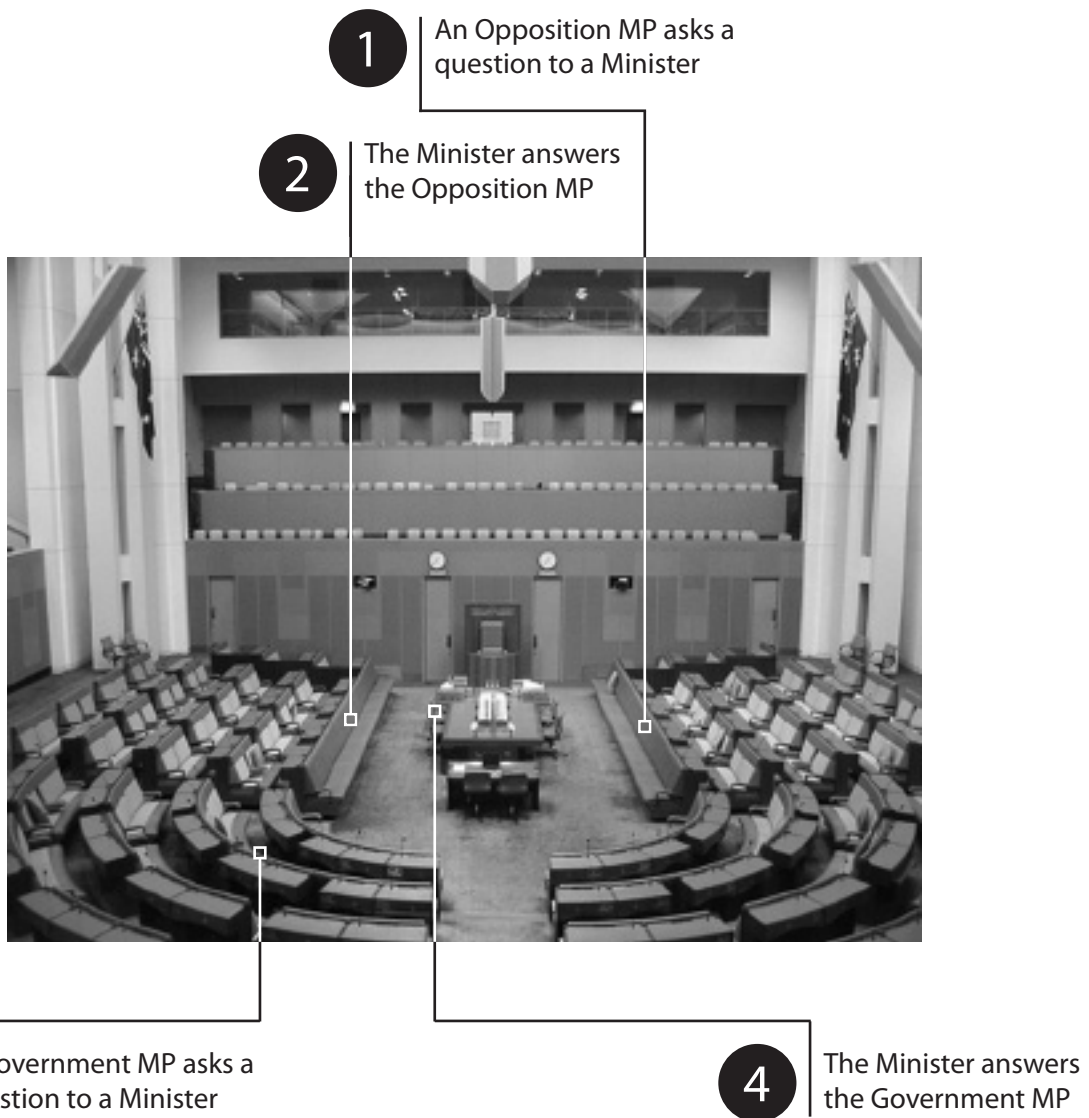
What happens during question time?

Members of Parliament (MPs) can address **'questions on notice'** or **'questions without notice'** to particular Ministers. With questions without notice, Ministers do not know the

questions that Opposition MPs are going to ask. Questions alternate between Government and Opposition MPs. Questions and answers should be brief.

Who asks questions and who answers them?

This photo below shows question time in the House of Representatives. Question time in the Senate is very similar.



The Budget

What is the Budget?

The budget is a plan of how the Government is going to spend its money. Every May, the Treasurer announces the plan the Government has made for paying its normal running expenses and for new projects. A new budget is made every 12 months.

Where does the money come from?

A part of a person's wage or salary is paid to the Government as income tax. More than half of the Government's budget comes from income tax.

What happens when the budget has been announced?

The budget must be agreed to by the Parliament before the money can be spent. This is because the budget is a Government proposal, just like any other bill.

Once both Houses of Parliament agree on the budget, it is sent to the Governor-General who signs them and they become law.

The Opposition and the budget

The Opposition usually has different views on how money should be raised and spent. The Leader of the Opposition expresses these views during a debate on the budget bills and when he/she is given a special opportunity to reply to the Treasurer's budget speech.

Your Rights

You and other Australians have:

The right to vote

- All Australians who are 18 years and older must register to vote
- Find out about the people who want to represent you and what they plan to do for you. Vote for the candidates who you believe will represent you well

Freedom of speech

- You are free to say what you think about local, State and Federal Government policies
- If you feel that you have a problem or something to say, you can contact the media
- Write a letter to the editor to be published in the newspaper
- Call talkback radio
- Sign a petition
- Contact your elected representatives and let them know what you think
- Send a submission to a Parliamentary committee. They are advertised in major newspapers

Freedom of Association

- You are free to join any organisation, union, or group you choose
- You can join a political party. This allows you to be involved in choosing candidates and making policies

Freedom of Assembly

- You are free to meet with people in public or private places. This can be in small or large groups
- In Australia you have the right to organise or attend a rally. You must always obey the laws about behaviour in public places

Freedom of Religion

- In Australia you are free to follow any religion that you choose

Freedom of Movement

- You can move freely between all States and Territories and leave Australia at any time

Firsts in Australian political history

1901

FIRST PRIME MINISTER

Sir Edmund Barton
29 March 1901

FIRST GOVERNOR-GENERAL

John Adrian Louis Hope

FIRST FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Met on the 9 May 1901 in the Exhibition Building in Melbourne. The Victorian Parliament House was then used in Melbourne. In 1929 it moved to the provisional Parliament House in Canberra and later to the current Parliament House in Canberra

FIRST HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SELECT COMMITTEE

6 June 1901 – it inquired into the adoption of decimal coinage and the mining of gold, silver and copper coins

FIRST SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE

26 July 1901 – it examined steamship communication between Tasmania and Australia.

1903

FIRST TIME WOMEN VOTED IN A FEDERAL ELECTION

1906

FIRST REFERENDUM TO ALTER THE CONSTITUTION

Allowed both Houses of Parliament to hold elections at the same time

1908

FIRST COAT OF ARMS

Granted in 1908

1914

FIRST DISSOLUTION OF BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT AT THE SAME TIME

30 July 1914

1924

FIRST CABINET MEETING IN CANBERRA

1930

FIRST AUSTRALIAN BORN GOVERNOR-GENERAL

Sir Isaac Isaacs

1943

FIRST FEMALE MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Dame Enid Lyons

FIRST FEMALE SENATOR

Dorothy Tangney

1971

FIRST ABORIGINAL MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Neville Bonner

1986

FIRST WOMEN TO LEAD A POLITICAL PARTY

Senator Janine Haines (Australian Democrats)

2008

FIRST FEMALE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Julia Gillard (Australian Labor Party)

FIRST FEMALE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

Quentin Bryce

2010

FIRST FEMALE PRIME MINISTER

Julia Gillard (Australian Labor Party)

FIRST ABORIGINAL MEMBER OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Ken Wyatt (Liberal Party of Australia)

Australia's Prime Ministers



Edmund Barton
1901–03
Protectionist Party



Alfred Deakin
1903–4; 1905–8; 1909–10
Protectionist Party



John Watson
1904
Australian Labor Party



George Reid
1904–05
Free Trade



Andrew Fisher
1908–9; 1910–13; 1914–15
Australian Labor Party



Joseph Cook
1913–14
Liberal Party



William Hughes
1915–23
*Various – See below**



Stanley Bruce
1923–29
National Party



James Scullin
1929–32
Australian Labor Party



Joseph Lyons
1932–39
United Australia Party



Earle Page
1939
Country Party



Robert Menzies
1939–41; 1949–66
Liberal Party



Arthur Fadden
1941
Country Party



John Curtin
1941–45
Australian Labor Party



Francis Forde
1945
Australian Labor Party



Ben Chifley
1945–49
Australian Labor Party



Harold Holt
1966–67
Liberal Party



John McEwen
1967–68
Country Party



John Gorton
1968–71
Liberal Party



William McMahon
1971–72
Liberal Party



Gough Whitlam
1972–75
Australian Labor Party



Malcolm Fraser
1975–83
Liberal Party



Bob Hawke
1983–91
Australian Labor Party



Paul Keating
1991–96
Australian Labor Party



John Howard
1996–2007
Liberal Party



Kevin Rudd
2007–2010
Australian Labor Party



Julia Gillard
Current
Australian Labor Party

* William Hughes changed parties several times:
1915–16 *Australian Labor Party*
1916–17 *National Labor Party*
1917–23 *National Party*

Glossary

A

Act of Parliament: A law made by Parliament; a bill that the Parliament has passed and has been signed by the Governor-General

Amendment: A change to a bill, an Act or the Constitution

Aye: The word used for voting “yes” in the Parliament

B

Backbencher: A member of Parliament who is not a Minister or Shadow Minister and sits behind the front bench (on the back bench) in the chambers

Ballot-Paper: A piece of paper that lists the names of those wanting to be elected. The voter then marks the person that they want to be elected

Bells: Bells that ring to call Members into the chambers at the beginning of a meeting, because a vote is about to be taken, or because there are not enough members in the chamber

Bill: An idea for a law that has been presented to the Parliament

Black Rod: The symbol of authority of the Senate and of the Queen. The black rod is ebony in colour and has a silver Australian Coat of Arms and crown on it

Budget: A plan that shows the Parliament how much money the government expects to get and how it will spend the money in the coming year

By-election: A special election held to replace a Member of the House of Representatives who has died or retired

C

Candidate: Someone who stands for election

Chamber: The meeting room of a House of Parliament. In Australia’s Federal Parliament there are two chambers or meeting rooms, the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Clerk: The most senior public servant in each chamber. The clerk writes down all the decisions that are made in the chamber

Coalition: The joining together of two or more political parties to form a Government or an opposition.

Committee, Parliamentary: A small group of Members of Parliament, usually from all parties, which meets to investigate and report on a particular subject.

Commonwealth of Australia: A group of states and territories that have joined together to form the Federal Government

Conscience Vote: A vote in Parliament in which Members are free to vote as they choose (not what their political party tells them to)

Constitution: The set of rules by which a country or state is run

Council: The Government of a small local area (for example, Blacktown City Council)

Crossbench: Seats in both houses of Parliament for members who do not belong to either the Government or the Opposition i.e. seats for minor party and/or independent members

Cross the floor: When a member of Parliament does to the other side of the chamber and votes with an opposing party

D

Debate: The controlled discussion on a bill or other topic in which different views are put forward.

Democracy: A government where the people elect representatives to govern for them; a country that has such a government and; the idea that everyone in a country has equal rights

Department: A group of public servants who work on policy for the Government (eg. The Department of Transport).

Despatch Boxes: Two ornamental boxes on the table of the House of Representatives from which the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Ministers and Shadow Ministers give their speeches

Division: When members of the House of Representatives or Senate move to one side of the chamber to vote for or against a bill.

E

Election: When a person or Government is chosen by voting

Electoral Roll: A list naming all the people who are allowed to vote

Electorate: The area that a Member of Parliament represents

Electorate Office: The office in a Member of Parliament’s electorate where the Member works when Parliament is not meeting in Canberra

F

First Reading: The first of the stages that a bill must go through in order to become an Act. The clerk reads the full title of the bill aloud

Frontbench: Those Members of Parliament who are Ministers or Shadow Ministers; The seats where these Members sit

G

General Election: An election for all the seats in the House of Representatives and half the seats in the Senate

Government:

1. The group of people who control or run a country or state. This is the party who wins the most seats in the House of Representatives
2. The system of rules under which a country or state is run

Governor General: The representative of the Queen to the Federal Parliament in Australia

H

Hansard: The printed record of all the words spoken in Parliament

House of Assembly: The name of the lower House of Parliaments of South Australia and Tasmania

I

Independent (Member or Senator): A member of Parliament who does not belong to a political party

L

Law: A rule or set of rules made by the Parliament

Leader of the Opposition: The leader of the party which is the next largest after the Government party in the House of Representatives. It is made up of Members who do not support the Government

Legislation: A law or set of laws; The making of laws

Legislative Assembly: The Lower House of State Parliament in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia . It is also the name used for the only House in Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

Legislative Council: The Upper House of Parliament in all states except Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory , which only have a Lower House.

Local Government:

1. The management of a shire, municipality or town, by people who are elected by residents of that area
2. The group of people who are elected to local government, usually called a council

Local Member: The term for a Member of Parliament used by the people of the electorate that he/she represents

Lower House: The name sometimes given to the House of Representatives

M

Mace: A symbol of the Lower House of Parliament and its Speaker. The mace is carried by the Serjeant-At-Arms

Mayor: The leader of a City or Shire Council

Media: television, radio, newspapers

Member: A person who has been elected to the House of Representatives

Member of Parliament: A member of either House of Parliament, but usually used to describe members of the Lower House, who have the letters "MP" shown after their names

Minister: A senior member of Parliament who is usually in charge of a Government Department (eg. Minister for Defence)

O

Opposition: The second largest party or group of parties in the House of Representative after the Government party. The opposition talks about what it thinks is wrong with what the Government is doing

P

Parliament: In Australia, a Parliament consists of a group of elected representatives and a person who represents the Queen. In Federal Parliament that person is the Governor General

Parliamentary Committee: A small group of Members of Parliament, usually from all parties, which meets to investigate and report on a particular subject

Parliament House: The building where Parliament meets

Petition: A request in writing often with a lot of signatures presented to the Parliament asking for something to be done

President: The Senator who is elected to run the meetings in the Senate

Prime Minister: The Minister in charge of the Federal Government

Q

Question Time: A time on each House of Parliament during which Ministers are asked questions about their areas of responsibility

R

Referendum: A vote by all voters on a particular question(s). In Australia it is nearly always a public vote on a proposed law to change the constitution

Royal Assent: The signing of a bill by the Governor-General. This is the last step in making a bill into a law. In state Parliaments the Governor signs the bill

S

Senate: The Upper House of the Federal Parliament of Australia. The Senate has 76 Senators, twelve from each of the six states and two each from the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory

Senator: A member of the Australian Senate

Serjeant-at-Arms: The person who carries the mace and is responsible for keeping order in the House of Representatives chamber within Parliament House

Shadow Cabinet: A group of Members from the main opposition party or parties in the Parliament. They act as spokespersons for the Opposition on the main areas of Government

Shadow Minister: A member of the Shadow Ministry. Shadow Ministers look closely at what the Government Ministers are doing

Shire: A local Government area

Speaker of the House of Representatives: The person who is elected by the Members of the House of Representatives to run the meetings in the House of Representatives

Standing Orders: The permanent rules under which must be followed in Parliament

U

Upper House: Another name often used for the Senate

Usher of the Black Rod: The Usher of the Black Rod gets the name from the Black Rod that he/she carries and is responsible for maintaining order in the Senate chamber and within Parliament House

W

Whip: The manager of a party who makes sure that members of his/her party take part in debates and vote. The whip also helps decide who speaks in debates



IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE WITH ANY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MATTERS, PLEASE CONTACT MY OFFICE:

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