



STUDENT INFORMATION KIT



Australian Federal Parliament



**With compliments from
the Hon Warren Truss MP
Member for Wide Bay**

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THE HON WARREN TRUSS MP Federal Member For Wide Bay

**Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Infrastructure
and Regional Development**

Biography

Warren Truss is Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development.

He became Leader of the Nationals in 2007 and is the longest serving federal leader of any political party in Australia today.

A third generation farmer from the Kumbia district near Kingaroy in Queensland, Mr Truss first won the federal seat of Wide Bay in 1990.

He was a Minister in the Howard Government for 10 years, serving as Minister for Customs and Consumer Affairs from October 1997, and a year later, Minister for Community Services. In July 1999 Mr Truss became the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, where he served for six years. He became Minister for Transport and Regional Services in July 2005 and, in September 2006, was appointed Minister for Trade.

Before entering Parliament, Mr Truss was a Kingaroy Shire Councillor (1976 to 1990), including seven years as Chairman. He was Deputy Chairman of the Queensland Grain Handling Authority and a member of the State Council of the Queensland Graingrowers Association for more than 10 years.

Mr Truss is also former State and National President of the Rural Youth Organisation and President of the Lutheran Youth of Queensland.

At the 2013 federal election, Mr Truss led The Nationals to the Party's best electoral result in 30 years.

Local achievements and goals

Families in Wide Bay want to live in a strong and safe community. Given our nation's financial circumstances, I am committed to responsible economic management to restore business and consumer confidence in our future.

I support policies and local initiatives that create jobs and protect our precious environment.

Locally, I am delivering on the Coalition Government's commitment to improve the Bruce Highway to make it four lanes between Cooroy and Curra. We are also funding the construction of safety improvements and more overtaking lanes along the Highway through Wide Bay and beyond.

Other local priorities include:

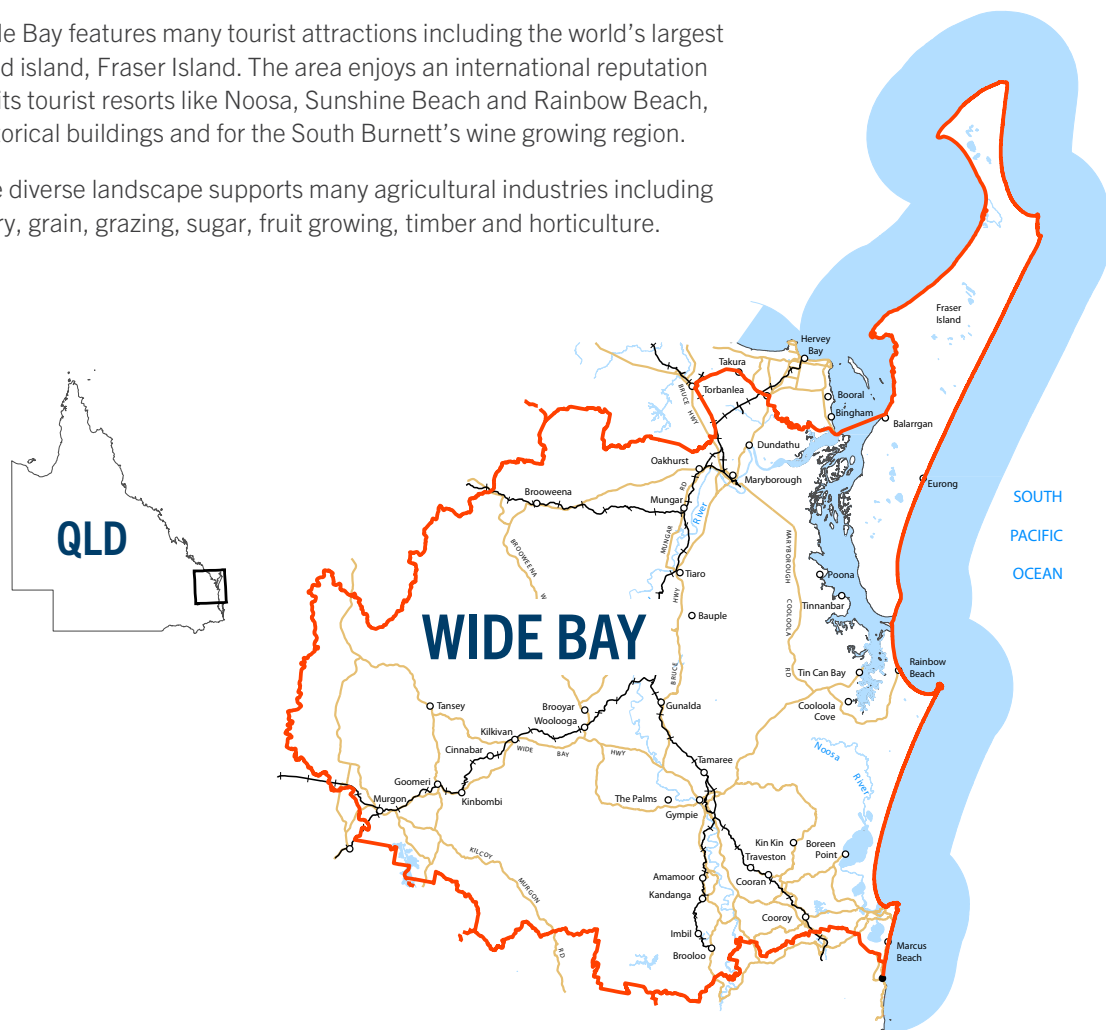
- implementing policies to create jobs, support business, boost tourism, and strengthen the economy
- the delivery of high speed broadband and better mobile phone reception to coastal and inland communities
- real action to improve local health, education and disability services throughout the electorate
- encourage economic, social and environmental assistance to help the recovery of the Mary Valley following the decision not to proceed with the Traveston Crossing dam
- Provide strong and effective representation to get results for everyone in Wide Bay

About the electorate

The electorate of Wide Bay currently includes the population centres of Maryborough, Peregian, Noosa, Tewantin, Cooroy, Gympie, Tin Can Bay, Cooloola Cove, Rainbow Beach, Kilkivan, Goomeri, Murgon and Cherbourg and covers an area of approximately 14,573 sq km.

Wide Bay features many tourist attractions including the world's largest sand island, Fraser Island. The area enjoys an international reputation for its tourist resorts like Noosa, Sunshine Beach and Rainbow Beach, historical buildings and for the South Burnett's wine growing region.

The diverse landscape supports many agricultural industries including dairy, grain, grazing, sugar, fruit growing, timber and horticulture.



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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF PARLIAMENT

Federation

Before 1901, Australia consisted of six British colonies which were partly self-governing, but under the law-making power of the British Parliament. Many colonists wanted their colonies to unite into one federation. During the 1890s, a series of public meetings, called conventions, were organised throughout the six colonies to decide the shape of a new federal constitution. Some of the people who ran these meetings wrote a constitution which was voted on by citizens in each colony.

After the colonial citizens voted in favour of the new constitution, it was passed as a British Act of Parliament in 1900 and came into force on 1 January 1901. This meant that the six colonies became a federation of states (known as the Commonwealth of Australia) and transferred some of their power to the Commonwealth Government. In 1911, the Commonwealth Government established the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, making Australia a federation of six states and two territories.

Other federations around the world include the United States, Canada, Malaysia, Brazil, Germany and India.

The Constitution

The Australian Constitution sets out the rules by which Australia is governed. These rules cover the following areas: how Federal Parliament is composed, how Parliament works, the powers of the Parliament, how federal and state parliaments share power and the role of the High Court.

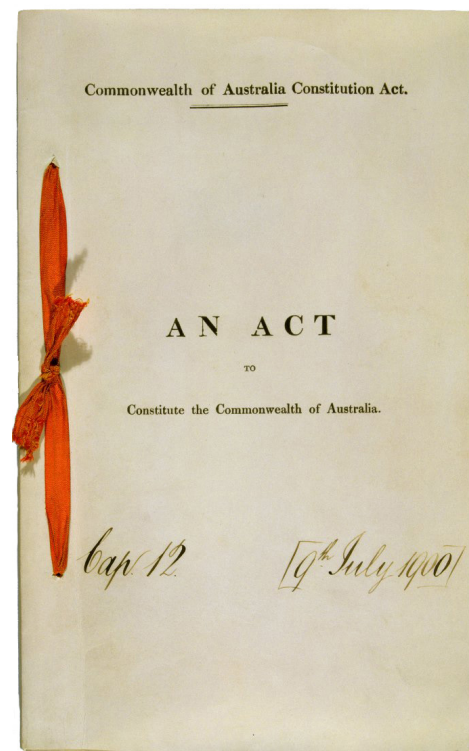
The Constitution is divided into eight chapters and 128 sections. Although the Constitution is detailed, there have been many different interpretations and legal arguments about its content over the last century.

Chapters I, II and III of the Constitution detail the roles of the three arms of governance: the Parliament, the Executive Government and the Judicature. Amongst other things, these chapters formalised an important concept in Australia's system of governance called 'Separation of Powers'.



National Library of Australia, an14292110

Image 1: The Australasian Federation Conference, Melbourne, 1890



Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra

Image 2: Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act

Separation of Powers

In Australia the power to make and manage federal law is divided between three groups. This division is based partly on the principle of *separation of powers*. Under this principle, the power to govern should be distributed between the Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary to avoid any one group having all of the power. Each group should work within defined areas of responsibility so that each keeps a check on the actions of the others (see image 3).

The Parliament—(also referred to as the legislature), comprises the Queen, represented by the Governor-General, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Parliament has the power to make and change laws in the areas listed in the Australian Constitution (section 51).

The Executive—comprises the Prime Minister and ministers. The Executive has the power to look after existing laws, suggest new laws and put laws into action through government departments.

The Judiciary—comprises the High Court and other federal courts. The Judiciary has the power to interpret laws and judge whether particular laws apply in individual cases. The Judiciary also hears and decides on disputes according to the law.

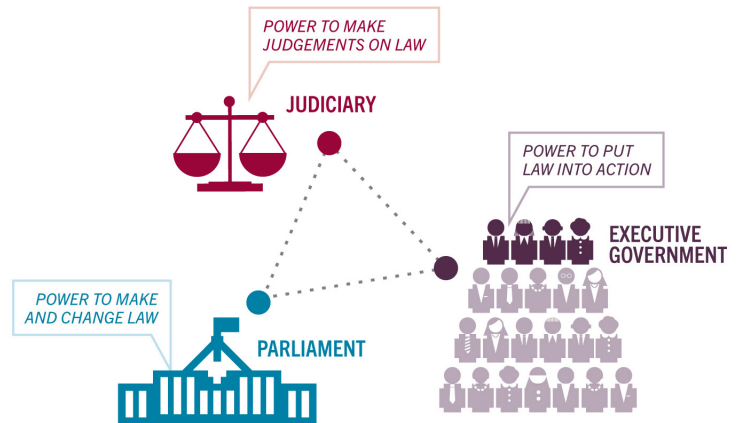


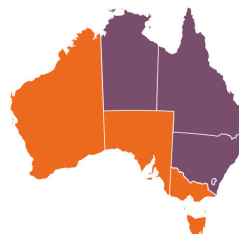
Image 3: Separation of Powers

The Australian Constitution can only be changed with the support of the majority of Australian voters **and** a majority of voters in at least four states.



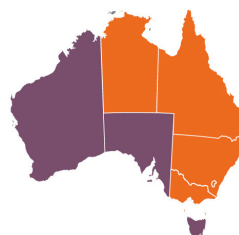
SCENARIO ONE CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION

- ✓ Majority of Australian voters
- ✓ Majority of voters in at least four states



SCENARIO TWO DON'T CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION

- ✗ Majority of Australian voters
- ✓ Majority of voters in at least four states



SCENARIO THREE DON'T CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION

- ✓ Majority of Australian voters
- ✗ Majority of voters in at least four states

Changing the Constitution

The Constitution may only be changed by a referendum. In a referendum, each eligible Australian 18 years and over votes on a specific change to the Constitution. A referendum is only passed if it is approved by a majority of voters in a majority of states, and by a majority of voters across the nation as a whole (see image 4). Since 1901, of 44 proposed changes to the Constitution only eight have been passed.

Image 4: Changing the Constitution

Parliament and Government

What is Parliament?

A **Parliament** is a meeting or assembly for the purpose of discussing public or national affairs. A Parliament is also a law-making body in many countries around the world.

The name Parliament is derived from the French word *parlement*, meaning a talk, discussion or meeting where people discuss matters.

What is government?

The word **government** can refer to:

- the system of rules used within a state or community (for example, Australia has a democratic system of government)
- the governing body within a state or community
- in some parliamentary systems, the group of people forming the executive who are responsible for directing the national rules and strategies.

Australia's Federal Parliament and Government

In Australia the Federal Parliament and the Federal Government are not the same – the Government is a part of the Parliament. The Executive is a part of the Government.

The four main functions of the Federal Parliament are to represent the people of Australia, make and change laws, provide a place where government is formed and scrutinise the work of government.

In comparison, the main roles of the Federal Government are to make important national decisions, develop policy, introduce ideas for laws and implement laws through government departments.

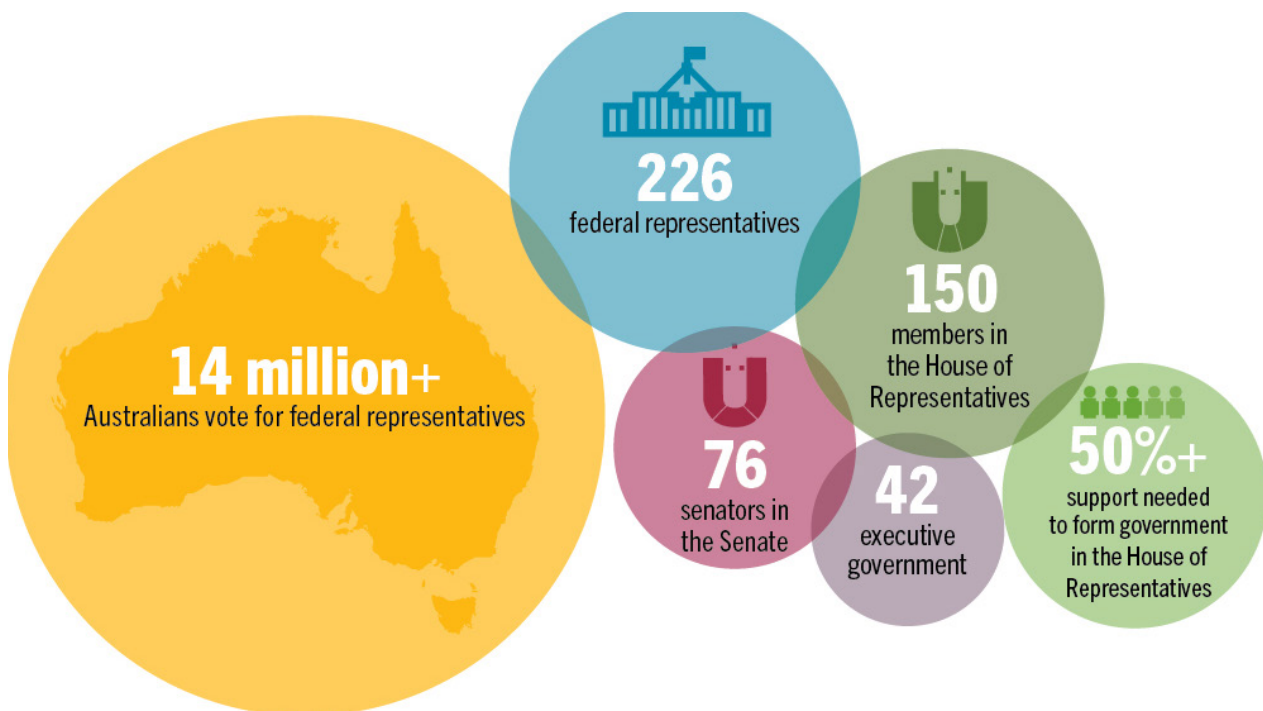


Image 5: Parliament and government

Three Levels of Governance

In Australia power is shared between three levels of governance. This shares the responsibility of law-making between federal, state/territory and local legislators. A democratically elected parliament or council runs each level of governance. These parliaments and councils have power to collect taxes to pay for their programs. The Federal Parliament also transfers money to the state, territory and local governments. State parliaments transfer money to local councils.

Federal Parliament

The Federal Parliament makes laws about national matters for all Australians and is located in Canberra. There are two houses of Federal Parliament: the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The powers of the Federal Parliament are listed in section 51 of the Constitution and include defence, foreign affairs, trade and immigration.

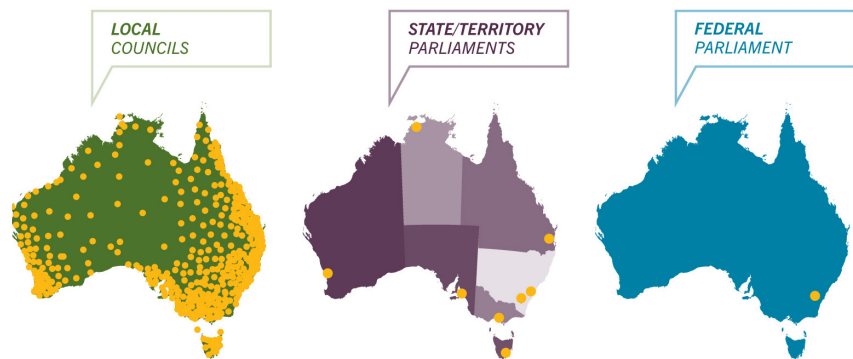


Image 6: Law-making bodies in Australia

State and territory parliaments

State and territory parliaments make laws about state and territory matters. Each of the states, except Queensland, has two houses of parliament. Each lower house is called either a Legislative Assembly or a House of Assembly. Each upper house is called a Legislative Council. The parliament of each territory has only one house, called a Legislative Assembly.

The powers of the state and territory parliaments include health, education, utilities (such as electricity and water supply), transport, agriculture and forests.

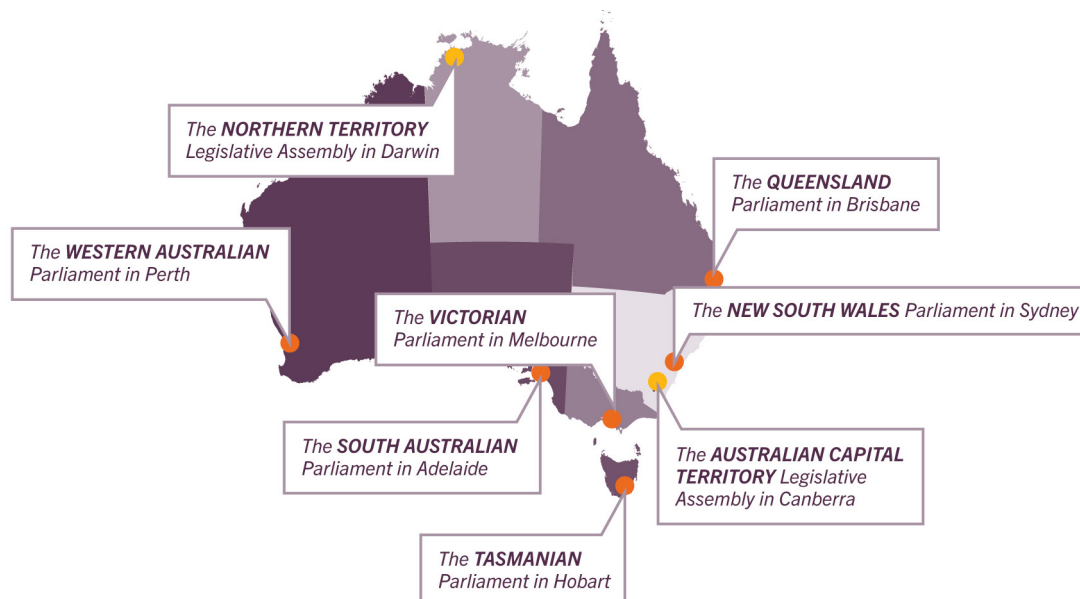


Image 7: The law-making powers of state and territory parliaments

The federal Parliament makes laws for Australia on matters such as:



Image 8: Federal laws

State and territory Parliaments make laws for their state/territory on matters such as:



Image 9: State and territory laws

Local councils make laws about local matters such as:



Image 10: Local council laws

Local councils

There are over 700 councils across Australia. Acts of state parliaments define the local government powers in each state. The elected members of local councils are usually called councillors or aldermen while the leader of the council is usually called the mayor or president.

The councils make by-laws about local matters such as roads, parks and playgrounds, rubbish collection, library services, sporting fields, street signage and domestic animal regulation (see image 10).

Shared responsibility

On some matters the federal and state parliaments and local councils have shared powers and responsibilities. This means that both the Parliament of Australia and the state parliaments may make laws about the same things. However, section 109 of the Australian Constitution states that if a state law conflicts with a federal law then the federal law will prevail.

CHAPTER 2: FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Composition of the Parliament

The Federal Parliament consists of three elements:

1. the Queen, who is represented in Australia by the Governor-General,
2. the Senate, and
3. the House of Representatives.

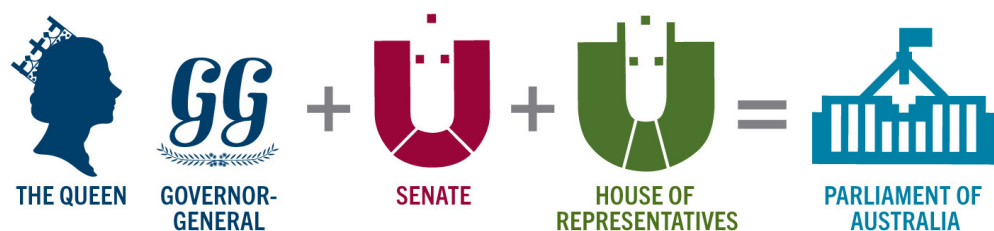


Image 11: Composition of the Parliament

The Parliament is bicameral, which means that there are two houses and a bill (an idea for a law) has to pass with a majority vote in both houses to create a new law. This was based on a combination of the British Westminster system and American federalism.

The home of the Federal Parliament is Parliament House, Canberra. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have their own chamber in Parliament House that is designed and constructed to meet their specific needs.

The Functions of Parliament

The Federal Parliament has four main functions: representation (acting on behalf of voters and citizens), law-making (legislation), scrutiny (examining the government) and providing a place for the formation of government.

Representation

Australians are represented by members in the House of Representatives and senators in the Senate, collectively known as members of parliament. Members and senators represent their electorate and state/territory constituents by finding out about people's interests and concerns and by speaking about them in the Parliament. Members and senators also represent their parties by contributing to party room debate and by supporting party decisions.

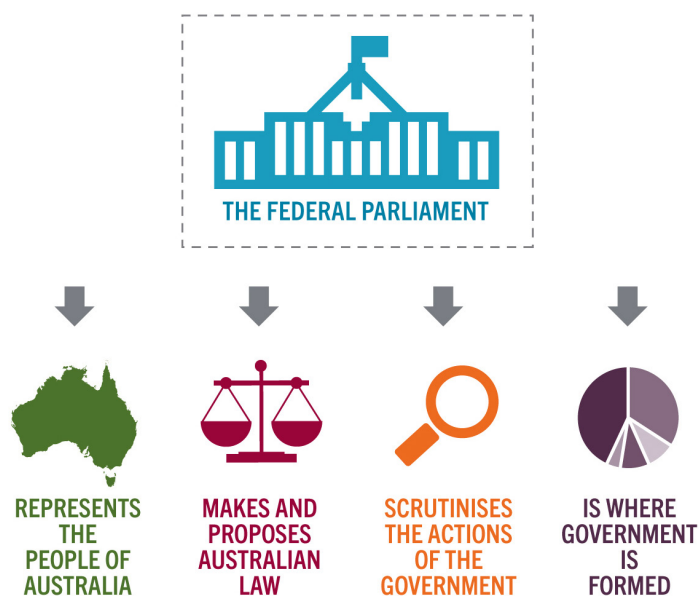


Image 12: Roles and responsibilities of the Parliament

Law-making

Making and changing laws is the primary function of the Federal Parliament. Under the Australian Constitution, the Parliament of Australia makes laws about national matters. See pages 23—24 for more details about law-making in Federal Parliament.

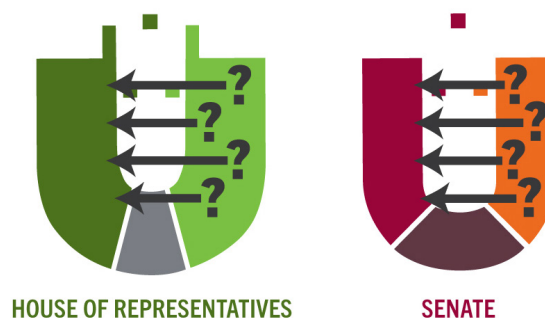
Scrutiny

The government has the most power to make and change laws. It is therefore important that the work of the government is examined closely by the rest of the Parliament, and that any concerns are brought to the attention of the media and the public. This is called scrutiny.

Senators and members scrutinise the government by:

- setting up parliamentary committees
- investigating how the government spends money
- questioning the government each day in Question Time in both the House of Representatives and the Senate
- talking with the media.

The opposition scrutinises government actions, decisions, policy, spending and statements



Forming government

After a federal election, the team (party or coalition) with support of the most members elected to the House of Representatives becomes the government. The leader of the government (the Prime Minister) then selects fellow parliamentarians to be ministers. Each minister is responsible for a specific 'portfolio' or area of interest. For example, the Minister for Defence will oversee all issues to do with defence and will run the Department of Defence. Although the government is formed in the House of Representatives, some senators are also ministers.

Federal Elections

Electing federal representatives

Every three years parliamentarians are chosen for the Federal Parliament through a democratic election process. In federal elections all Australian citizens 18 years and over must vote for individuals to represent them in each house of parliament.

This system of representative democracy means that parliamentarians are chosen to make laws and decisions on behalf of Australians. It is the job of elected parliamentarians to find out about electoral issues and concerns and to voice them in Parliament. In this way, the Parliament is accountable to the people and serves the people. The views of Australians guide the Parliament in making laws for Australia. If Australians are unhappy with their representatives, they can vote for a different parliamentarian at the next federal election.

Compulsory voting

In Australia, all citizens 18 years and over must enrol to vote. It is also compulsory to attend a voting place on election day (or to vote by mail). Compulsory voting was introduced at the federal level in 1924 and occurred for the first time at the 1925 federal election.

Electing members to the House of Representatives

Members of the House of Representatives are elected to represent the people within a geographical area called an electorate. Despite differences in area, electorates contain approximately the same number of people (an average of 92 000). This means that every person's vote has the same value.

The boundaries of electorates change as the population of Australia increases and moves around. There are currently 150 electorates in Australia; therefore there are 150 members in the House of Representatives – one per electorate.

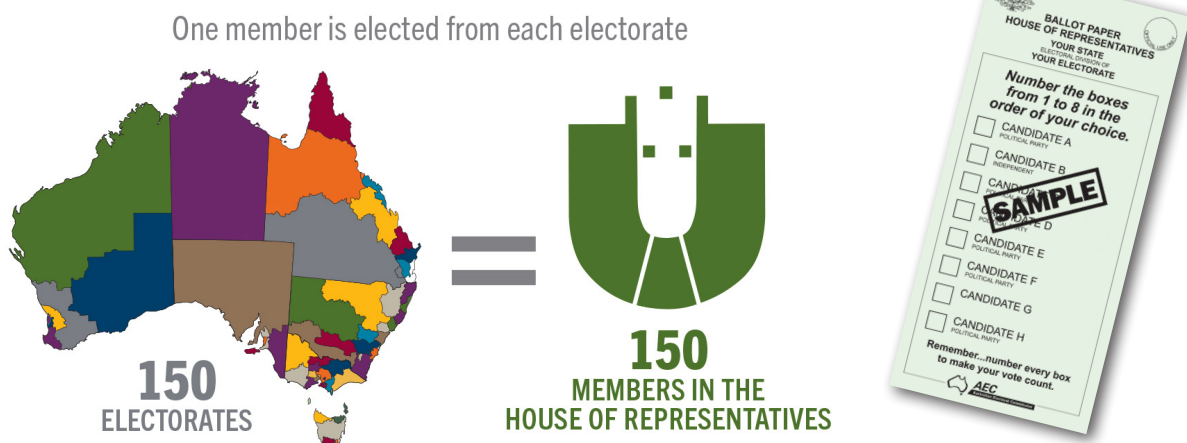
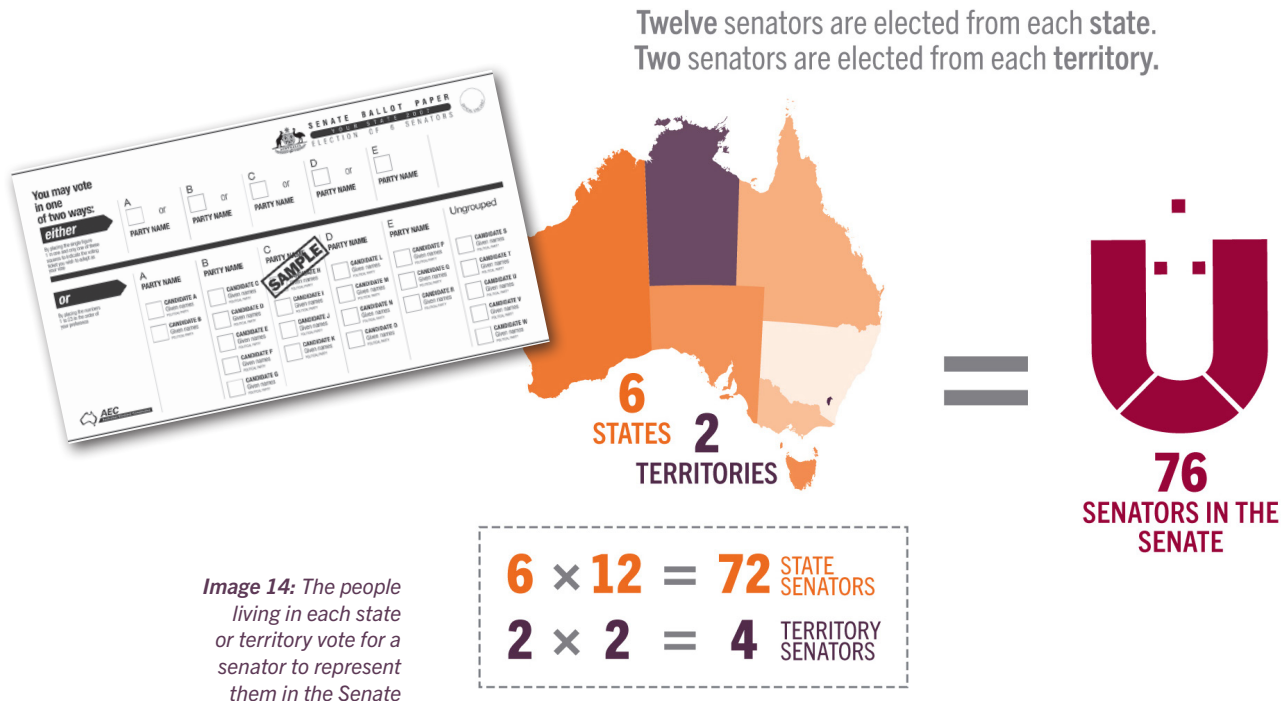


Image 13: The people living in each electorate vote for a member to represent them in the House of Representatives

Electing senators to the Senate

Senators are elected to represent the people of a state or territory. In contrast to the House of Representatives, states are represented equally regardless of geographical size or population. In the Senate each state is represented by 12 senators and each territory is represented by 2 senators.



Political parties

Most members of parliament are members of political parties. A political party is an organisation that works to represent groups of people and ideas, and to turn those ideas into laws through the Parliament. The two largest parties in the Federal Parliament are the Liberal Party of Australia and the Australian Labor Party. Smaller parties include the Nationals, the Australian Greens and the Family First Party. Political parties must register with the Australian Electoral Commission and conform to certain rules under the Electoral Act.



Image 15: How to form a political party

Head of State

The Queen

Along with the Senate and the House of Representatives, the Queen is a part of Australia's Parliament. This is because Australia is a constitutional monarchy. Australia's current head of state is Queen Elizabeth II, who is also Queen of the United Kingdom and several other countries formerly part of the British Empire. The Queen's role is a formal, symbolic and ceremonial position.

Under the Australian Constitution the powers of the Queen are assigned to a representative known as the Governor-General. This means that the role of head of state is performed by the Governor-General. The Queen's main task in Australia is to appoint the Governor-General and when she does this, the Queen follows the advice of the Australian Prime Minister. The Constitution also gives the Queen the power to stop an Australian Act of Parliament, but this has never been done and it is extremely unlikely that it would ever be done.



Image 16: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The Governor-General

The Governor-General performs the role of head of state on behalf of the Queen. The Governor-General will continue to represent the Queen in Australia as long as Australia remains a constitutional monarchy. The current Governor-General is His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd).

Some responsibilities of the Governor-General include:

- giving Royal Assent to bills that have passed the Senate and the House of Representatives
- appointing ministers, judges and other officials
- meeting foreign heads of state and ambassadors
- formally awarding honours and decorations
- exercising powers as the Commander in Chief of the armed forces (the Minister for Defence advises the Governor-General on behalf of the government)
- opening a new session of parliament
- attending Anzac Day ceremonies and opening many public conferences and exhibitions
- supporting worthy organisations
- meeting many Australians to hear their concerns.



Image 17: His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) Governor-General of Australia

The House of Representatives

The chamber

The House of Representatives is one of two chambers in Federal Parliament where members discuss, debate and make decisions about national issues. It is also known as the 'lower house'. Similar to the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, the House of Representatives is green. In a typical year, the House of Representatives meets for approximately 70 days.



Image 18: Features of the House of Representatives chamber

Members in the House of Representatives

A person who is elected to the House of Representatives is called a Member of Parliament - MP for short. Each member represents an electorate containing an average of 94 000 voters. There are currently 150 electorates in Australia, so there are 150 members in the House of Representatives. Members are elected for three years at a time, though there is no limit on how many times a member can be re-elected. Members are often referred to by the name of their electorate; for example, the Member for Newcastle.

Members of the government sit to the Speaker's right in the chamber and members of the opposition sit to the Speaker's left. See *Image 21* to see where various members and parliamentary officers sit in the chamber.

In addition to their work in the chamber, members spend time helping people in their electorate. People seek assistance from their federal member when they are having difficulties with issues such as taxes, immigration, health and pensions. Members may also get involved with community groups such as pensioner associations and sporting bodies.

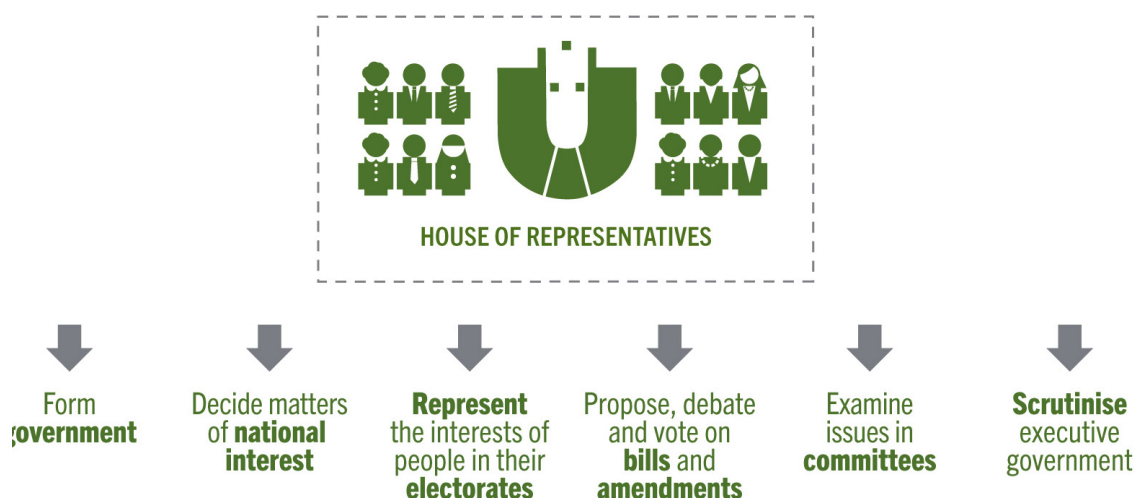


Image 19: Role of the House of Representatives

The Speaker

The Speaker sits at the head of the chamber and is responsible for the orderly running of the House of Representatives. The Speaker ensures that the rules of the House of Representatives, called 'standing orders', are followed and that order is maintained. The Speaker is also the spokesperson for the House of Representatives in its relations with the Senate, the Governor-General, the government, the courts, other parliaments and the people.

The Speaker does not usually take part in debates or chamber votes. This ensures that the Speaker is impartial. The only time the Speaker votes in the chamber is when the result is tied. The Speaker then has a casting vote to break the deadlock.

At the beginning of each new parliament after a general election, the members' first task is to choose a new Speaker. The Speaker is selected from among the 150 elected members of the House of Representatives, usually nominated by the government. If there is more than one candidate, members use a secret vote to choose someone. A Deputy Speaker and a panel of Acting Deputy Speakers are also selected to share the load of chairing the House.



Image 20: The Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP

The Government

In Australia the government is formed by the team (party or coalition) with the majority of members in the House of Representatives. This is done to guarantee the passing of bills, especially money bills, which are needed to keep the government and the country functioning. The Liberal Party of Australia, the Nationals and the Country Liberal Party are currently in Government.

The leader of the government is the Prime Minister. He or she sits at the centre table in the House of Representatives. The Prime Minister is traditionally a member of the House of Representatives and is elected by his or her fellow government members and senators. Equally, at any time, the team can vote the Prime Minister out and replace him or her with another government member of parliament. The current Prime Minister is the Honourable Tony Abbott MP.

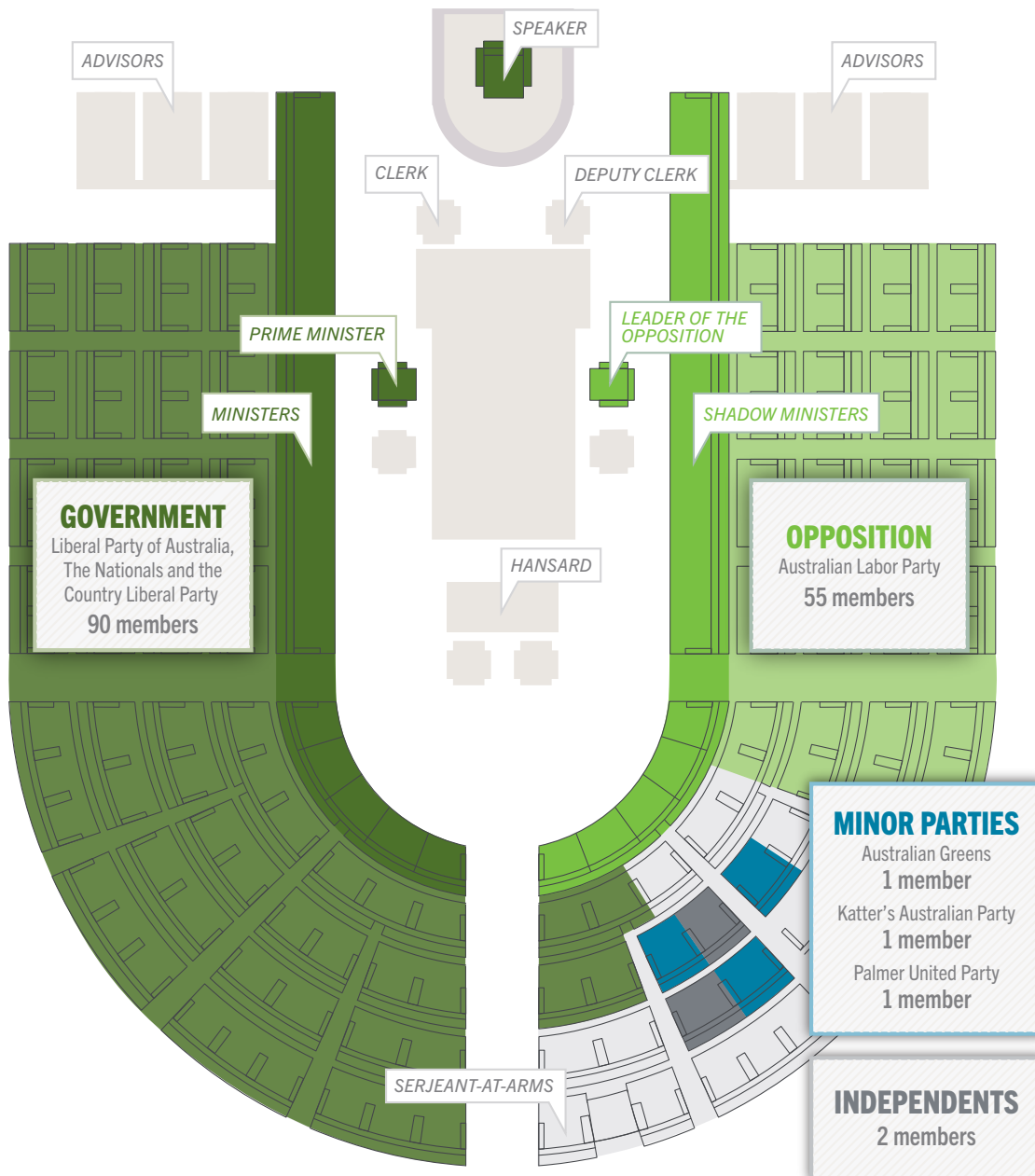


Image 21: House of Representatives seating plan

The Prime Minister has a major influence on government policies and how the government runs the country because of his or her power and experience. The Prime Minister's many roles in Federal Parliament include:

- selecting members and senators to be ministers
- leading the team of senior ministers (called the Cabinet)
- chairing party meetings in which ideas for new laws, or changes to current ones, are discussed
- representing Australia overseas
- advising the Governor-General about important matters
- deciding when to call an election and leading the government in the election.

Ministers (government frontbenchers) are government members or senators who are given additional responsibility by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister chooses experienced and knowledgeable parliamentarians to focus on specific issues (also known as portfolios) such as Defence, the Environment, Education and Health.

Each minister is in charge of a department such as the Department of Defence. Ministers work with their department, other community organisations and professional associations to prepare proposals for laws and changes to current laws, to be considered by parliament.

Typically, there are about 20 ministers in the House of Representatives and about 10 in the Senate.

Ministers sit on a long bench in the front row of the government. Government backbenchers sit behind the ministers.



Image 23: The Prime Minister, The Hon Tony Abbott MP speaking from the Despatch Box in the House of Representatives



Image 22: Ministers (government frontbenchers)

The Opposition

The major party or parties that are not in the government may form the opposition and choose to vote with or against the government on any issue. The party currently in opposition is the Australian Labor Party.

The Leader of the Opposition is traditionally a member of the House of Representatives. He or she sits at the centre table in front of the opposition, opposite the Prime Minister. The Leader of the Opposition is elected by his or her fellow opposition members and senators. Equally, at any time, the opposition can vote the Leader of the Opposition out and replace him or her with another opposition member of parliament. The current Leader of the Opposition is the Honourable Bill Shorten MP.



Image 25: The Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Bill Shorten MP

The Leader of the Opposition's many roles in Federal Parliament include:

- selecting members and senators to be shadow ministers
- leading the team of shadow ministers (called the Shadow Cabinet)
- chairing opposition meetings in developing opposition policy
- acting as the chief spokesperson for the opposition inside and outside parliament
- leading the opposition in an election.

Shadow ministers (opposition frontbenchers) are opposition members and senators who are given additional responsibility by the Leader of the Opposition. Senior members of the opposition are appointed as shadow ministers to concentrate on the work of particular government departments. They are responsible for closely examining the work of the government and of individual ministers; this is called scrutiny.

Shadow ministers also explain to the parliament what the opposition would do about specific problems if the opposition were the government. If there is a change of government after an election the shadow ministers are generally expected to become ministers.

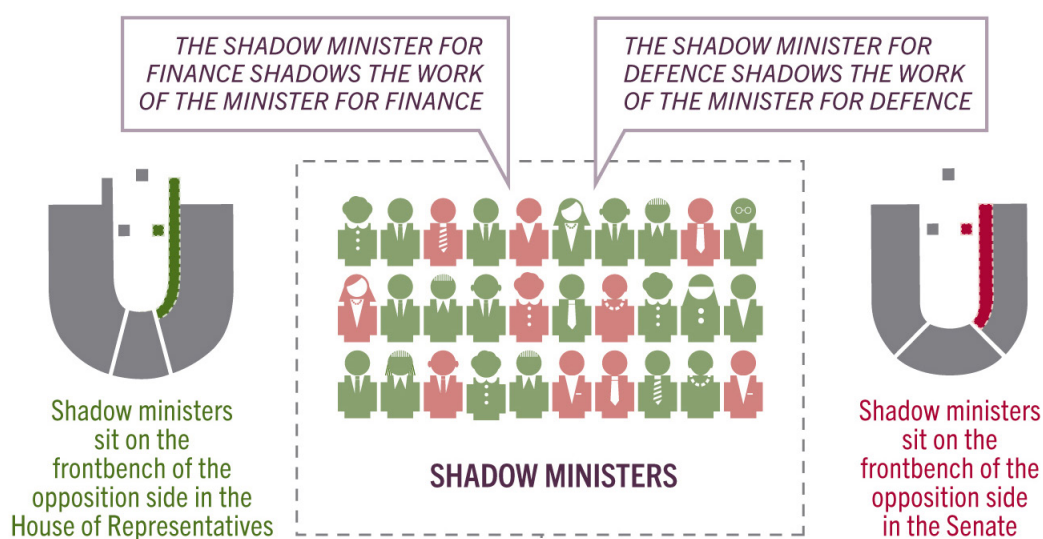


Image 24: Shadow ministers (opposition frontbenchers)

Minor parties and Independents

The majority of members of parliament belong to a political party. Political parties that have much smaller numbers of members than the major parties are called 'minor parties'. There is currently one minor party represented in the House of Representatives: the Australian Greens.

'Independents' are members who do not belong to a political party. Independents are usually elected because they are well-known and respected in a community and have a strong personal following. There are currently four Independents in the House of Representatives.

The Serjeant-at-Arms

The Serjeant-at-Arms sits at the back of the House of Representatives. He or she helps the Speaker maintain order in the chamber, gives advice to members and delivers paperwork and messages to the Senate. The Serjeant-at-Arms carries the Mace (the symbol of the Speaker's authority) into the chamber to begin each session and removes the Mace at the close of proceedings. The office of the Serjeant-at-Arms also has other administrative and security-related responsibilities such as advising the Speaker on broadcasting policy and taking bookings for visitors to the House of Representatives.



Image 26: The Serjeant-at-Arms

Auspice

The Senate

The chamber

The Senate is one of two chambers in Federal Parliament where senators discuss, debate and make decisions about national issues. It is also known as the 'upper house'. Similar to the House of Lords in the United Kingdom, the Senate is red. The name 'Senate' is derived from the United States Congress and consists of senators who represent each state and territory in the federation. In a typical year, the Senate meets for approximately 55 days.



Image 27: Features of the Senate chamber

Senators

A person elected to the Senate to represent a state or territory is called a Senator, but can also be referred to as a member of parliament. There are currently 76 senators elected to the Senate. Each state is represented by 12 senators and each territory by 2 senators.

Each state senator is elected for a period of six years, in contrast to territory senators who are elected for a period of three years.

Similar to the House of Representatives, government senators sit to the President's right and opposition senators sit to the President's left. See *Image 30* to see where various senators and parliamentary officers sit in the chamber.

See *Image 28* to learn about the various responsibilities of a senator.

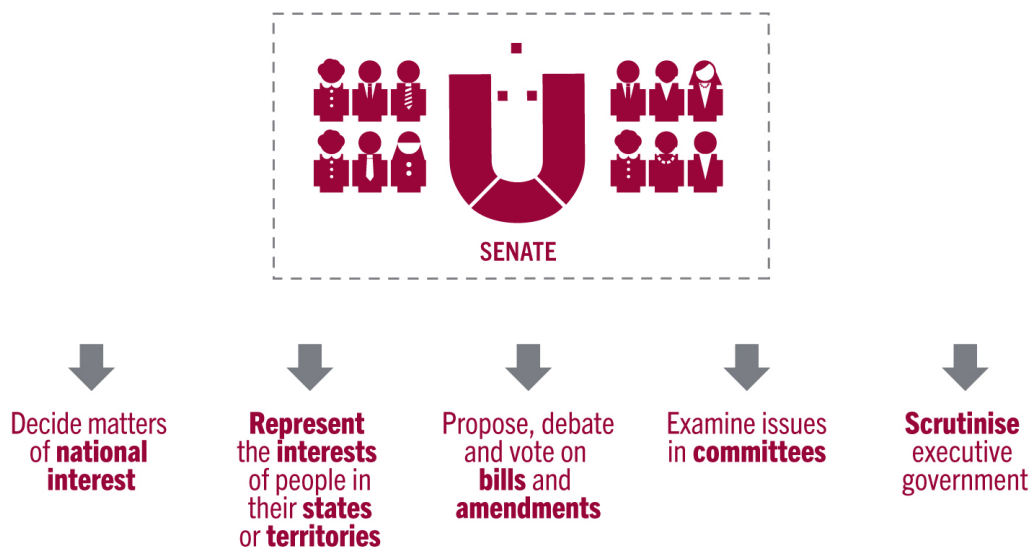


Image 28: Role of the Senate

The President

The President sits at the head of the chamber and is responsible for the orderly running of the Senate. The President makes sure that the rules of the Senate, called 'standing orders', are followed and that order is maintained. The President is also the spokesperson for the Senate in its relations with the House of Representatives, the Governor-General, the government, the courts, other parliaments and the people.

The President does not usually take part in debates, but does vote like other senators. This ensures that all states and territories have equal representation when votes are taken. In the event of a tied vote, a question is 'resolved in the negative' (lost), because a majority has not been reached.

Although the President is most often a government senator, he or she is expected to enforce the rules of the chamber with fairness and independence. There is also an elected Deputy President.

The President is elected from the chamber's 76 senators. All the senators elect the new President using a secret vote on the first sitting day after 1 July following a Senate election. A Deputy President and a panel of Acting Deputy Presidents are also selected to share the load of chairing the Senate.



Image 29: The President of the Senate,

The Government

Though the government is formed in the House of Representatives, there are also government senators in the Senate. Government senators sit to the right of the President's chair in the chamber. Unlike in the House of Representatives the government may not be the biggest party (or coalition) in the Senate.

The Leader of the Government in the Senate sits at the central table. He or she is the government's most senior minister in the Senate and is chosen by the government.

Ministers (government frontbenchers) sit in the front row of desks behind the Leader of the Government in the Senate; government backbenchers sit behind the ministers.

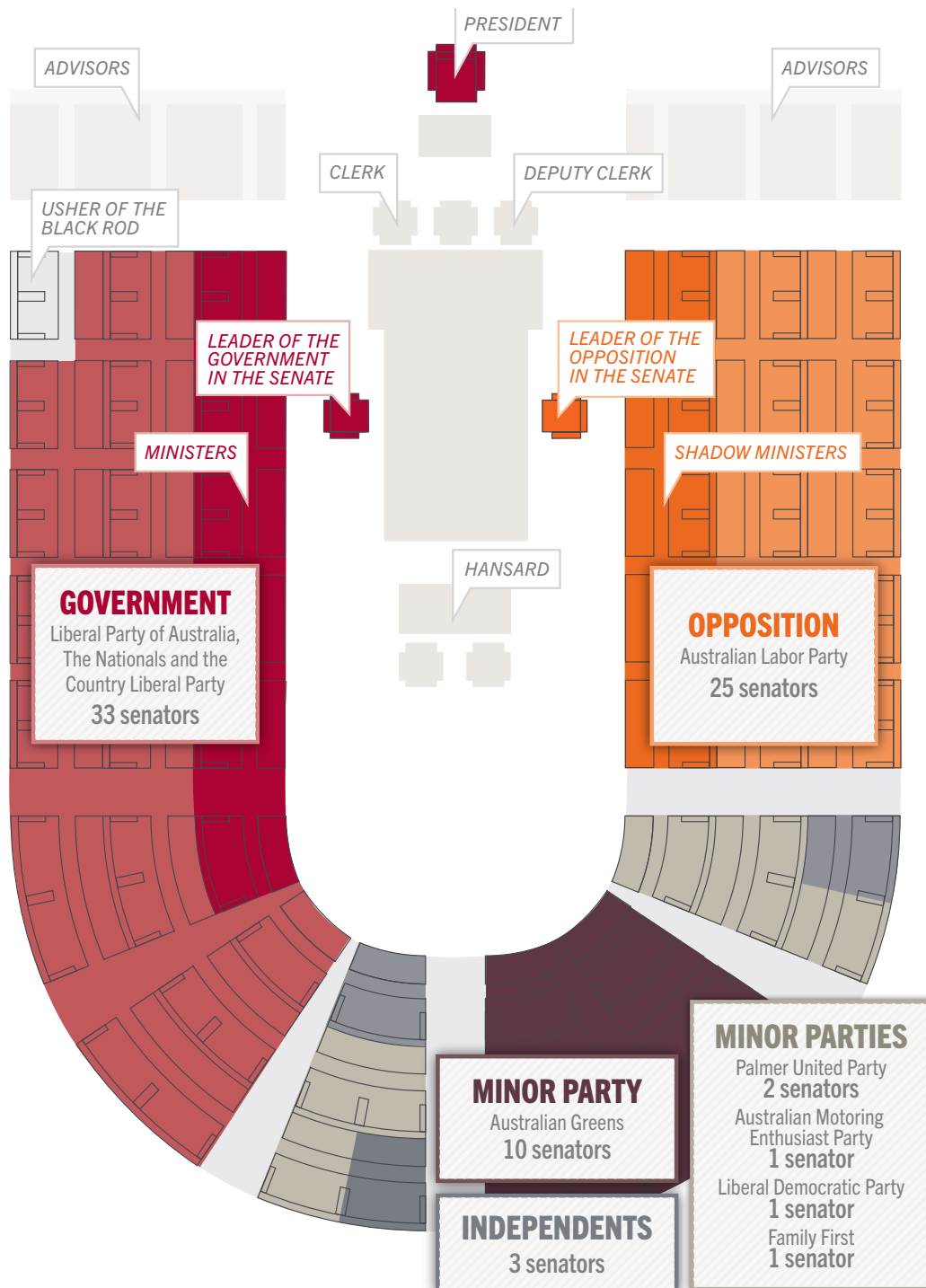


Image 30: Senate seating plan

The Opposition

Opposition senators sit to the left of the President's chair. Unlike in the House of Representatives, the Opposition may be the biggest party (or coalition) in the Senate.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate sits at the central table, across from the Leader of the Government in the Senate. The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate is the opposition's main spokesperson in the Senate.

Shadow ministers (opposition frontbenchers) sit in the front row of desks behind the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate; opposition backbenchers sit behind the shadow ministers.

Minor parties and Independents

The majority of senators belong to a political party. Political parties that have much smaller numbers of senators than the major parties are called 'minor parties'. There are currently two minor parties represented in the Senate: the Australian Greens and the Democratic Labor Party.

'Independent' senators do not belong to a political party. Independents are usually elected because they are well known and respected in a community and have a strong personal following. There is currently one Independent senator.

Independent and minor party senators usually sit on the cross benches, which are the seats that curve around at the end of the chamber and are furthest from the President. For this reason, they are sometimes called 'cross-bench senators'. Independent and minor party senators sometimes vote with the government and sometimes with the opposition. On some occasions they abstain and do not vote at all.

If the government does not have a majority in the Senate, it may need the votes of some or all of the Independents and minor party senators to pass a bill (a proposed law). Therefore, the government sometimes spends time and effort persuading Independents and minor party senators to support government bills.



Image 31: The Usher of the Black Rod

The Usher of the Black Rod

The Usher of the Black Rod sits to the right of the President in the backbench. He or she helps the President maintain order in the chamber, gives advice to senators and delivers paperwork and messages to the House of Representatives. The Usher of the Black Rod carries the Black Rod, which is a symbol of his/her office. The office of the Usher of the Black Rod also has other administrative and security-related responsibilities.

Clerks and other Parliamentary Officers



Image 32: The Clerks of the Senate

There are a number of people that work in the House of Representatives and Senate chambers that play an important role in the function of the parliament. Each chamber has people assigned to be Clerks, Hansard reporters, broadcasting operators and chamber attendants.

Clerks

Clerks sit in front of the Speaker or President at the centre table of each chamber. They must know all the rules and conventions of the parliament so they can assist the Speaker or President in the running of the chamber and give advice to members or senators. The Clerks also monitor the length of speeches and record chamber decisions. Clerks are the only non-elected people who are allowed to speak in the chamber when the parliament is sitting.

The Clerk and Deputy Clerk are the most senior parliamentary officers in each chamber. Each chamber also has several clerk assistants who share the work and take turns sitting at the centre table.



Image 33: Hansard reporters in the House of Representatives

Hansard reporters

Hansard is the written record of what members and senators say in parliament. A recording is made of all speeches and is used to create a printed and online document of everything that has been said, including interjections by members and senators. Hansard has been a part of our parliament since it began in 1901.

The Hansard reporters sit at a separate table in the middle of the House of Representatives or the Senate. Until recently, speeches were recorded by Hansard reporters in shorthand. Hansard now uses digital recording equipment and the Hansard reporters record details that the recordings might not pick up.



Image 34: A chamber attendant delivering a message in the House of Representatives

Chamber attendants

Chamber attendants assist the senators and members in the chambers. They ensure that senators and members have copies of the bills being debated that day, an agenda for the day's proceedings, water and other items they may require. Senators and members can call an attendant by pressing a button on their desks.



Image 35: Broadcasting operators in the Senate

Broadcasting operators

In addition to the recording of proceedings in Hansard, the action in the chambers is also recorded in audio and video. Both the House of Representatives and Senate chambers are set up with microphones to capture the speeches made by members and senators. There are also cameras placed around the chambers that capture the images of parliament in action. This audio and video footage is broadcast live around Parliament House to allow others in the building to keep track of what is happening. The chamber broadcasts can also be accessed live by the public through the Parliament House website. All of these facilities are organised by the broadcasting operators working in each chamber.

Making Federal Laws

What is a bill?

One of the major functions of Federal Parliament is to make and change laws. A proposal to create a new law or change a current one is called a 'bill'. Bills are created to solve specific problems in the Australian community.

The majority of bills are introduced to the parliament by the appropriate government minister (e.g. a bill about the military would be introduced by the Minister for Defence). However, an idea for a bill may come from a number of sources, including:

- ministers and their departments
- party policy
- parliamentary committees
- members and senators
- interest groups and/or members of the wider community.

Each week, parliament reserves time for any non-government member or senator to introduce their own bill, called a 'private member's bill'. These bills contain ideas which come from non-government political parties or citizens in the electorates of members and the states/territories of senators.

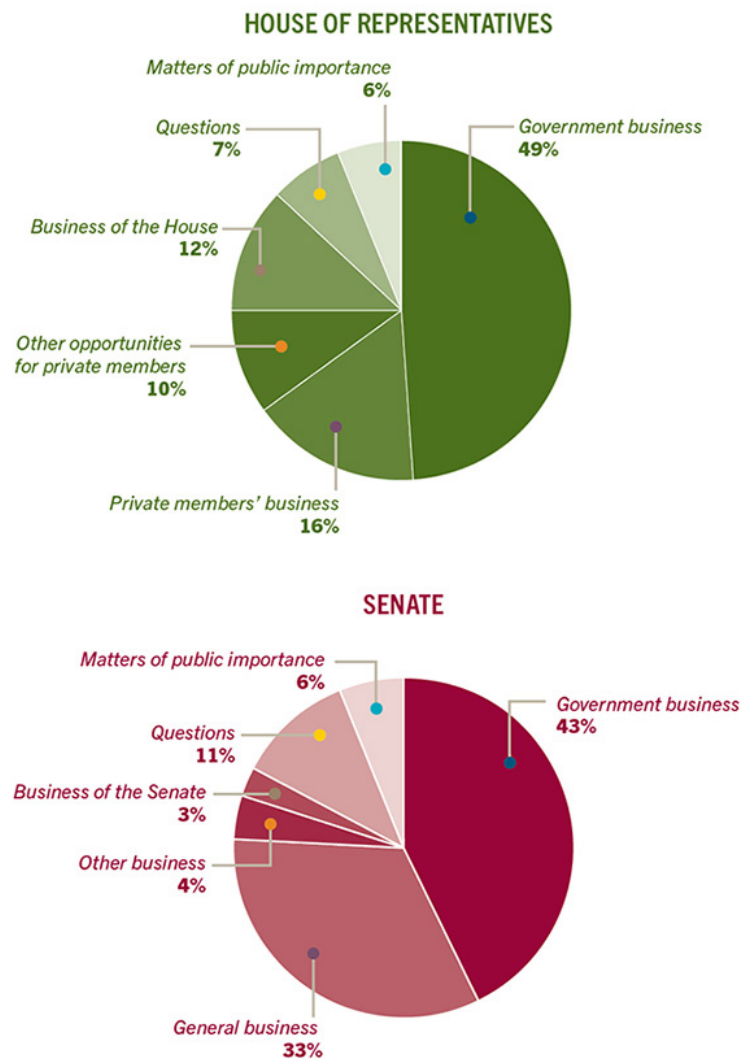


Image 36: Chamber Activity 2012 – debating of government bills makes up the majority of government business

Stages of law making

In order to become a law, a bill has to pass through three readings in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Then the bill must be signed by the Governor-General—called ‘royal assent’—before it becomes an Act of Parliament. The new Act of Parliament is a law for all Australians.

Parliamentary committees

Committees are part of the parliament and are established by the House of Representatives and the Senate to scrutinise bills or investigate issues in greater detail. Often, there is not enough time during debates in the chamber for the members and senators to investigate detailed and complex issues. So they vote to send an issue to one of their committees.

Parliamentary committees usually have six to ten members and/or senators from both government and opposition parties, as well as minor parties and Independents. One senator or member becomes the chairperson who runs the proceedings.

When parliament establishes an inquiry it decides the terms of reference or the specific purpose of the inquiry. The committee advertises in newspapers and invites written submissions from the public and experts on the subject.

The committee members read all the submissions and may invite selected people or groups to appear before the committee. Sometimes the committee travels to different places in Australia so that the members and senators can meet a wide variety of people.

After the public hearings are finished, the committee writes a report which the chairperson formally presents to the Parliament. Members and senators often use evidence from a report to propose amendments to a bill.

There are several types of committees. Most committees consist of senators only or members only, while others are joint committees and include both members and senators.

Estimates committees meet twice a year to scrutinise how the government has spent the budget funds. The only witnesses who appear before an estimates committee are ministers and senior public servants in government departments.

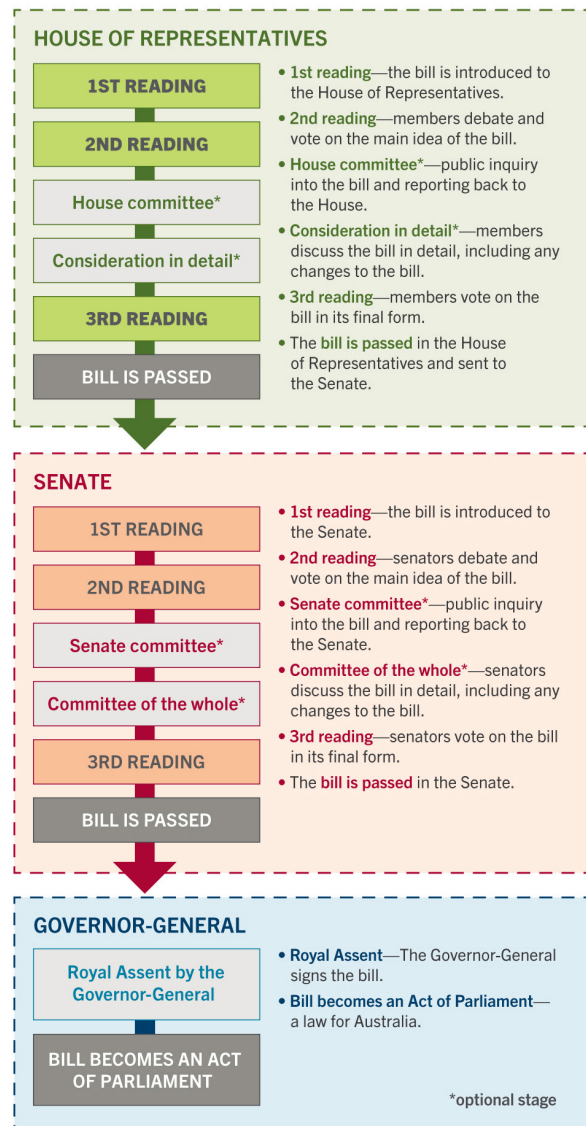


Image 37: Path of a bill



Image 38: A committee

Australia's Parliament House

Old Parliament House (renamed the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House)

Following the passing of the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act*, Australia's first Federal Parliament met in Melbourne on 9 May 1901. Until 1927, the Parliament continued to meet in the Victorian Parliament building. In 1911, the Australian Parliament decided that the new federal capital would be located between Sydney and Melbourne in a new city to be called 'Canberra'. Parliament House in Canberra was opened on 9 May 1927. The Federal Parliament used this building until 1988 when it moved into its current building.



Image 39: Old Parliament House

Australia's Parliament House

Since 1988, Australia's Federal Parliament has met in Parliament House on Capital Hill in Canberra, in the Australian Capital Territory.

The building

- An international competition to design the current Parliament House was won by Mitchell, Giurgola and Thorp Architects. Construction began in late 1980.
- The land on which Parliament House is built covers 32 hectares.
- The building was officially opened on 9 May 1988, and the first sitting of Parliament was on 22 August 1988.
- The building was constructed with 300 000 cubic metres of concrete and 90% of materials used are Australian.
- The flag mast is 81 metres high and weighs 220 tonnes. The flag is 12.8 metres by 6.4 metres which is about the same size as the side of a double-decker bus.
- The total cost of the building was \$1.1 billion and it is intended to last 200 years.



Image 40: Australia's Parliament House

Inside

- There are 4 500 rooms with a total area of 250 000 square metres.
- The foyer contains 48 Italian and Portuguese marble clad pillars.
- The colours of the two chambers are based on Westminster traditions of a green lower house and a red upper house.
- The greens of the House of Representatives chamber have been adapted to match the colours of Australian eucalypt and acacia trees.
- The reds of the Senate chamber have been adapted to match the reds of Australian soils and red gums.
- The House of Representatives has 536 seats in the public galleries while the Senate has 596.
- The Great Hall has a tapestry on the southern wall, woven in Melbourne and based on an Arthur Boyd painting of a bush landscape.
- There are hundreds of other works of art inside the building including rugs, paintings, sculptures and specially designed furniture. Among the many paintings are portraits of previous Prime Ministers, Speakers of the House of Representatives and Presidents of the Senate.

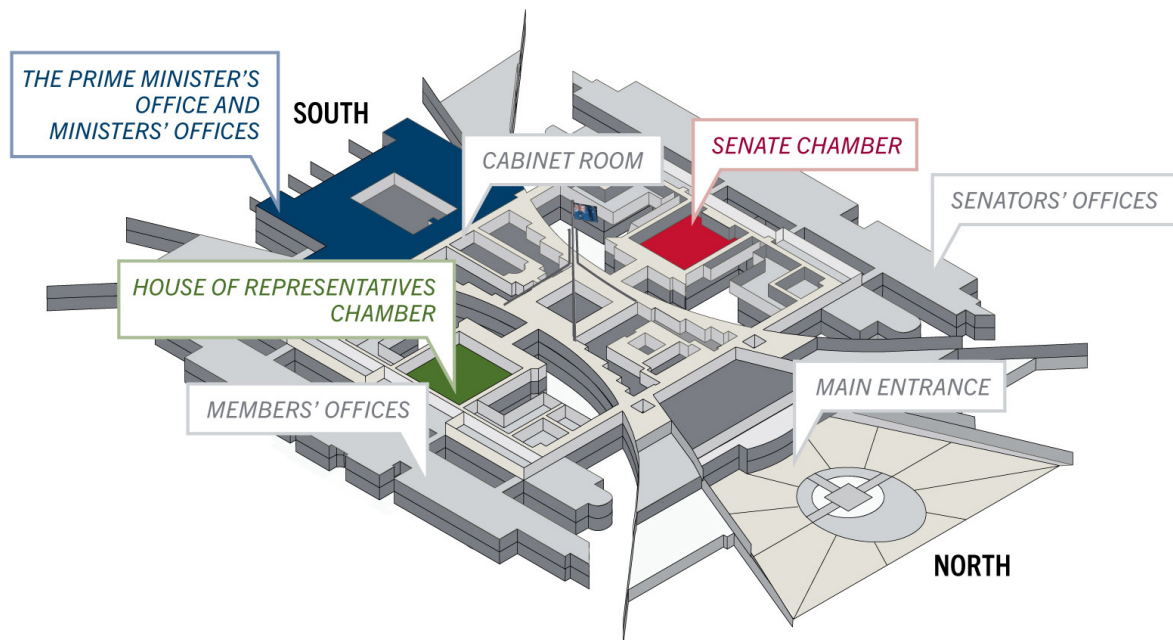


Image 41: Map of Parliament House

Symbols of our nation

Coat of Arms

The Commonwealth Coat of Arms is the formal symbol of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Australian Coat of Arms consists of a shield with the badges of each of the six Australian states, a red kangaroo on the left side of the shield and an emu on the right. Australia is written on a scroll underneath the shield. Our floral emblem, wattle, is also underneath the shield.

The Coat of Arms is one of the symbols of Federation. The Commonwealth uses it to identify its authority and property. However, it can also be found in many other places, for example on cricketers' caps and on Australian passports.



Image 42: The Commonwealth Coat of Arms

Australian flags

Australian national flag

The Australian national flag is Australia's foremost national symbol. It was first flown in 1901 and has become an expression of Australian identity and pride.

The Australian national flag flies over many Australian buildings, including the federal and state parliaments. The flag is paraded by our defence forces and displayed around the country at sporting events and by service organisations, schools, community groups and private citizens.

The Australian national flag has three elements on a blue background: the Union Jack, the Commonwealth Star and the Southern Cross. The Union Jack in the upper left corner (or canton) acknowledges the history of British settlement. Below the Union Jack is a white Commonwealth or Federation star. It has seven points: six to represent each of the states and the seventh point to represent the territories. The Southern Cross is shown on the right of the flag (known as the fly) in white. This constellation of five stars can only be seen from the southern hemisphere and is a reminder of Australia's geography.

A change to the *Flags Act 1953* was passed in 1998 to ensure that the Australian national flag can be changed only with the agreement of the Australian people.

Australian Aboriginal flag

The Australian Aboriginal flag was designed by Mr Harold Thomas and was first raised on 12 July 1971 at Victoria Square in Adelaide. It was also used at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972. It was not until 1995 that the Australian Aboriginal flag was proclaimed.

The top half of the flag is black to symbolise Indigenous people. The red in the lower half stands for the earth and the colour of ochre, which has ceremonial significance. The circle of yellow in the centre of the flag represents the sun.



Image 43: The Australian national flag



Image 44: The Australian Aboriginal flag

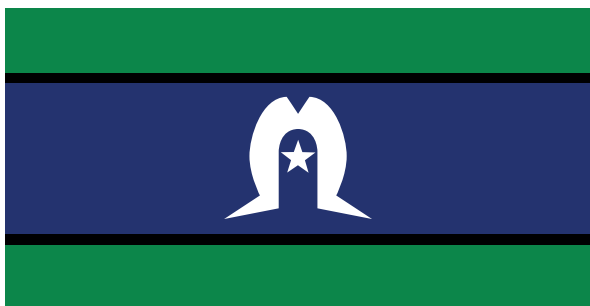


Image 45: The Torres Strait Islander flag

Torres Strait Islander flag

The Torres Strait Islander flag was adopted in May 1992 during the Torres Strait Islands Cultural Festival and officially proclaimed on 14 July 1995.

The design of the Torres Strait Islander flag was the winning entry in a competition organised by the Island Coordinating Council. The green panels at the top and bottom of the flag represent the land and the central blue panel represents the sea. The black lines dividing the panels represent the Torres Strait Islander people. The centre of the flag shows a white *dhari* (dancer's headdress) and is a symbol for all Torres Strait Islanders. Underneath the *dhari* is a white five-pointed star. The star is an important symbol for navigating the sea. The points of the star represent the island groups in the Torres Strait and white symbolises peace.

Australia's national anthem

The Australian national anthem, 'Advance Australia Fair', was declared the national anthem in 1984. It is a revised version of a song written by Peter Dodds McCormick (also known as Amicus) in the late 1800s.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Parliamentary Education Office
www.peo.gov.au



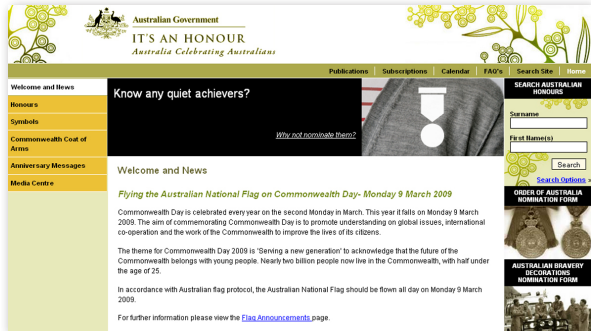
Australian Government
www.australia.gov.au



Australian Parliament
www.aph.gov.au



It's an honour
www.itsanhonour.gov.au



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