

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Australian Parliament consists of three elements:

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

The Parliament is bicameral, which means there are two houses, and a bill has to pass with a majority vote in both houses to create a new law.

The House of Representatives is also known as the 'lower house.' Although its name is derived from the United States Congress, it is based on the British House of Commons, even to the point of using the colour green in its furnishings and symbols.

The 150 members are elected for three years, each representing an electorate of about 150 000 people, of whom approximately 94 000 are eligible to vote.

The seating plan for members and parliamentary officials follows the traditional British pattern. The Speaker presides from a large Speaker's Chair, the government members sit on the Speaker's right and the members of the opposition sit to the Speaker's left. The Clerk and deputy Clerks sit in front of the Speaker at the centre table.

The leader of the government (Prime Minister) and the opposition (Leader of the Opposition) also sit at the centre table. Government ministers and opposition shadow ministers sit on a long bench seat in the front row on their respective sides. The backbenchers who sit behind each have their own seat and desk.

The government is formed by the party (or coalition of parties) 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 party or parties that are not in the government may form the opposition and may choose to vote with or against the government on any issue. The Speaker runs the proceedings of the House using the rules set out in Standing Orders. Most time is spent debating and voting on legislation. Members also scrutinise the work of the government in Question Time. Members represent their party and the people in their electorates when they speak during adjournment, grievance and matters of public importance debates.

The House of Representatives is always open to the media and the public who are free to enter and leave the chamber as they wish, although free ticket bookings are usually necessary to attend Question Time each day at 2pm.



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