

MINISTERS AND SHADOW MINISTERS

Ministers

Ministers are Members of Parliament who are given additional responsibility by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister chooses experienced and knowledgeable parliamentarians from the same party or party coalition. All the ministers work together as the government. Senior government ministers meet each week in Cabinet to consider ideas for new laws and solutions to solve current problems.

Each minister is in charge of a department such as the Department of Defence. Ministers work with their department and with other community organisations, and professional associations to prepare new laws and change old laws which need updating or improving. When a minister introduces a bill for a new law into the Parliament, he or she must explain to the Parliament why the law is necessary and how it will solve a particular problem. As soon as the bill becomes law, the minister and the department are responsible for implementing it throughout Australia.

All ministers must be able to stand up in Parliament each day at 2 pm during Question Time and answer questions from other members and senators about their departments and how the government is running Australia. Ministers in the government are responsible to the Parliament, and any members and senators can examine, scrutinise and criticise the work of the government through the work of each minister.

There are about 20 ministers in the House of Representatives and about 10 in the Senate.

Shadow Ministers

Shadow ministers are members and senators who belong to the opposition party. Although they have no power, they have a responsibility to scrutinise the work of the government and of individual ministers.

The Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives appoints senior members of his or her parliamentary party as shadow ministers who, like government ministers, concentrate on the work of particular departments such as Defence. Senior shadow ministers form a shadow cabinet which meets regularly and discusses opposition policy on current issues. 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 all expect to become ministers.