

THE SENATE

The Australian Parliament consists of three elements: the Queen, who is represented in Australia by the Governor-General, the House of Representatives, and the Senate. The Parliament is bicameral, that is, there are two houses and a bill has to pass with a majority vote in both houses to create a new law. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have their own chambers designed and constructed to meet the specific needs of each.

The Senate is also known as the 'upper house'. The tradition of decorating the upper house in red has followed the British tradition in the House of Lords and of the Australian state parliaments. However, the Senate upper house uses a modified red colour reflecting the colour of Australian desert sand and rock rather than the traditional rich dark reds of England.

The name Senate is derived from the United States Congress, and like that chamber, consists of Senators who represent each state and territory in the federation. The 76 Senators include 12 Senators representing each of the six states and two senators representing each of the two territories.

The seating plan for senators and parliamentary officials is similar to the House of Representatives. The President presides from a large chair at the western end of the chamber. Government senators sit to the President's right and the members of the opposition sit to the President's left.

The Clerk and one of the deputy Clerks sit in front of the President at the centre table. The Clerk and deputy Clerk records the main decisions and actions of the Senate. The Usher of the Black Rod carries the Black Rod into and out of the chamber at the start and conclusion of the day's proceedings.



Photo by AUSPIC

The Senate Chamber

At the centre table also sit the Leader of the Government in the Senate and the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. Government ministers and opposition shadow ministers sit behind their desk in the front row on their respective sides. The backbenchers who sit behind, like the ministers and shadow ministers, have their own seat and desk.

The Senate is always open to the press and the public who are free to enter and leave the chamber as they wish.