

THE SPEAKER

The Speaker runs the House of Representatives like a chairperson runs a meeting. The Speaker uses the rules of the House — the standing orders — which are determined by the members of the House.

The Speaker is also the spokesperson for the House of Representatives in its dealings with the Government, the Senate, the Governor-General and other parliaments.

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. If there is more than one candidate, members use a secret vote to choose someone who usually has a long parliamentary experience. The government candidate usually wins the speakership.

The House also elects a Deputy Speaker at the same time, and the major parties nominate a panel of Acting Deputy Speakers to share the load of chairing the House throughout the day.

The Speaker does not usually take part in debates. Even though the Speaker is usually a member of the government party, he or she must be seen to be impartial and not take sides. If the votes are equal, the Speaker uses a casting vote to break the deadlock but otherwise does not vote.

The office of Speaker is an ancient one dating back to 13th century England. In early English parliaments the Speaker informed the monarch about the decisions of the Parliament.

The Mace is the symbol of the Speaker and is placed on the centre table whenever the Speaker or the Deputy is in the chair and the House of Representatives is meeting officially.

The Speaker has a similar role to the President of the Senate. Both are Presiding Officers of the Parliament.



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The former Speaker of the House of Representatives