

SENATORS

A senator is a person who is elected to the Commonwealth Parliament to represent a state or territory. There are 76 senators, 12 from each state and two each from the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. The voters in each state and territory vote as one electorate in order to elect their senators.

To be elected to the House of Representatives or the Senate, a person must be aged 18 years or over, and be entitled to vote in Commonwealth elections. A candidate must also be an Australian citizen.

State senators are elected for a period of six years. A system of rotation ensures that half the state senators retire every three years. By contrast, the four senators who represent the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory are elected for a period of three years at the same time as the members of the House of Representatives and half of the Senate. The *Senate (Representation of Territories) Act 1973* enabled senators to be elected from the two territories. All senators can stand for re-election.

Sometimes there is a special election called a double dissolution, where all the senators retire, together with all members of the House of Representatives, and the entire Senate is newly elected.

Senators spend most of their time working on major issues that are important to their party, their state or territory and to Australia as a whole. Since most senators are elected for six years, they have time to build up knowledge and expertise on specific areas such as trade, defence and taxation. When senators are at Parliament House, they spend up to seventy percent of their time in senate committees, which scrutinise proposed legislation and related issues. Senators frequently travel throughout Australia as members of these committees, collecting information from various community groups and individual citizens. Senators use this expert knowledge when they scrutinise bills and propose amendments to bills.

Most senators belong to a political party such as the Liberal Party of Australia or the Australian Labor Party. There are usually a number of senators from smaller parties or groups such as the Nationals, the Australian Greens and the Democratic Labor Party. The number of parties in the Senate is usually greater than in the House of Representatives, which often means that a government with a majority of members in the House of Representatives does not have a majority in the Senate.

How to address a Senator:

- Senator Williams
- Senator Joanna Smith
- Senator the Hon Richard Thorpe