

## DOUBLE DISSOLUTION

A double dissolution is the shutting down or dissolution of both houses of Parliament and the calling of an election for all members and senators. The Governor-General calls a double dissolution at the request of the Prime Minister.

The Constitution says that the two Houses of Parliament have almost identical powers. The people who wrote the Constitution therefore saw the possibility of a deadlock between the two Houses in which the Senate will not pass what the House of Representatives wants. Section 57 of the Constitution describes how such a disagreement can be resolved; by dissolving both houses of Parliament and calling an election to let the voters decide how to end the deadlock.

Section 57 of the Constitution states that the Governor-General can dissolve both Houses of Parliament, provided that the following have occurred:

1. the House of Representatives passes a bill;
2. the Senate rejects, fails to pass or passes the bill with amendments to which the House will not agree;
3. three months elapse from the time the Senate disagrees with or fails to pass the bill;
4. the House of Representatives again passes the bill, and
5. the Senate again rejects, fails to pass or passes the bill with amendments to which the House will not agree.

Once these conditions (these are called triggers for a double dissolution) have been met, the Prime Minister may recommend to the Governor-General that a double dissolution of the Parliament takes place. A general election then takes place.

After a double dissolution, the bill is presented to both houses again. If a deadlock occurs once more, then the Governor-General can order a joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament in which all Members and Senators vote together on the legislation concerned. Such a joint sitting has happened only once (6–7 August 1974).

A double dissolution is the only time that all Senators go to an election at the same time.

There have been six double dissolutions of the Australian Parliament: 1914, 1951, 1974, 1975, 1983, and 1987.