

House of Representatives NOW

Also available in this series are:

- Parliament NOW
- Senate NOW

House of Representatives NOW explores the House of Representatives right now—what the chambers look like, who sits where and the all important numbers.

In this document you will find the following areas of content:

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- What does the House of Representatives look like?
- Who sits where?
- House composition
- House events
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About the House of Representatives

The House of Representatives has some defining characteristics. They are:

- The House of Representatives is one of two houses in the Australian federal Parliament.
- The House of Representatives is the people's house because in it the people of Australia are directly represented in electorates of roughly equal population.
- The House of Representatives is the chamber where government is formed. The party (or coalition of parties) with a majority of members forms the government with the leader becoming the Prime Minister. The government stays in office as long as it retains the majority of members.
- Community and media interest in the work of the House of Representatives is great.

What does the House of Representatives look like?

The House of Representatives bears the following distinctive characteristics:

Colour: Green is the traditional colour used in the British House of Commons. The Australian House of Representatives maintains this tradition while calling to mind the soft greens of the Australian eucalypt landscape.

Shape: The U-shaped seating arrangement is characteristic of Australian chambers. The U-shape encourages participation and debate, since all members can see and hear each other clearly.

Size: The current House of Representatives seats 150 members, including several unfilled seats that are in excess of present needs. Australia's Parliament House has been built with the expectation of serving Australia for 200 years. Thus, as the population of Australia grows and more members are elected, an additional row of seats may be added to the existing chamber.

Galleries: Members of the public are invited to view the chamber in session and are seated in public galleries that seat up to 536 people. The press, who occupy half of the second floor of Parliament House, enjoy a prime view of the chamber from above and behind the Speaker. In addition there are two small enclosed rooms at the end of the chamber. One for chamber attendants and the other for broadcasting announcers and technicians.

Other features: The table at the centre of the chamber houses a number of other interesting features including the Mace and despatch boxes.

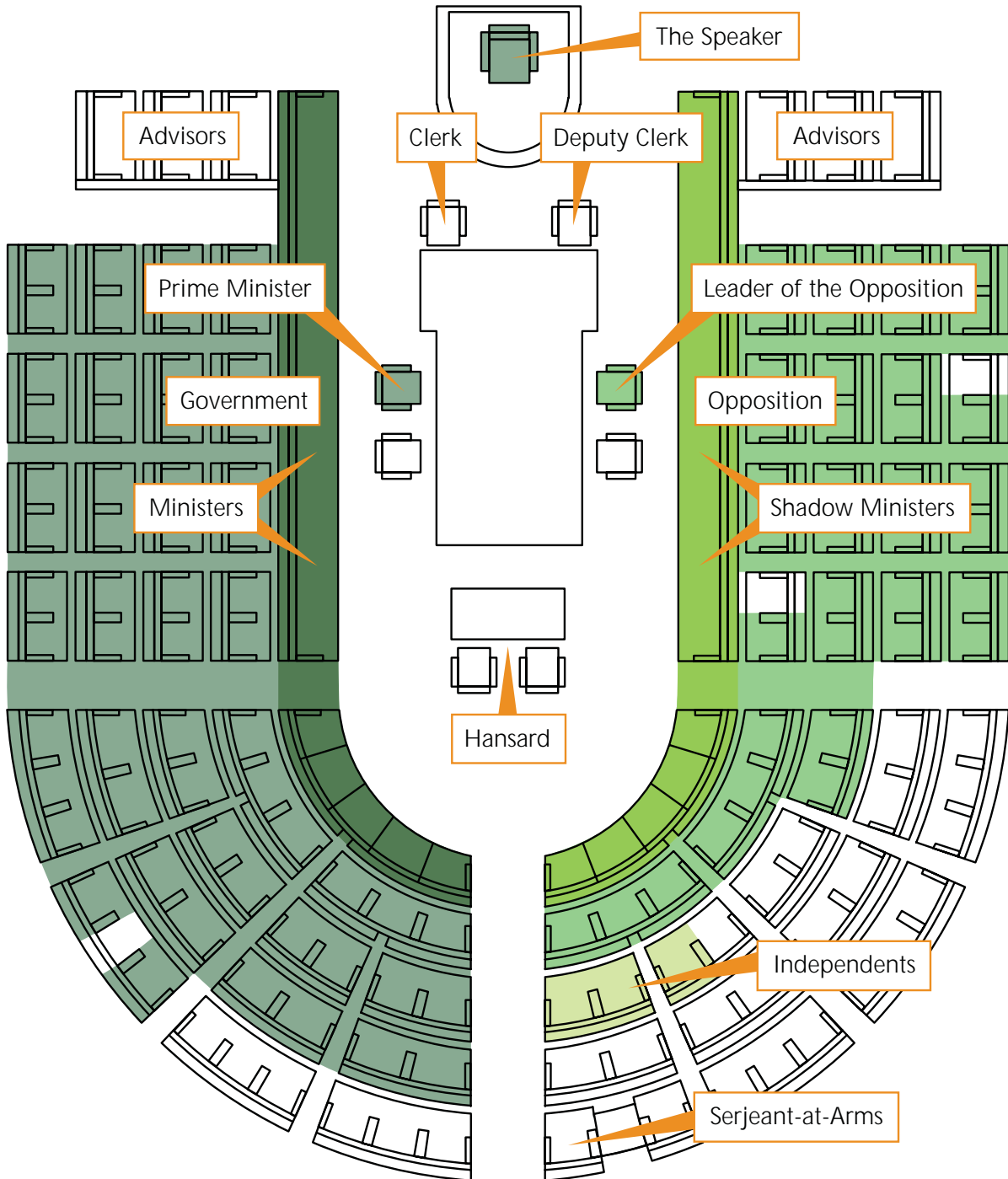


The House of Representatives chamber in Australia's Parliament House

Who sits where?

House of Representatives seats are arranged in a U-shape, with the Speaker sitting on the Speaker's Chair at the top of the room. Members of the government sit on the right of the Speaker and the opposition sit on the left. Leaders sit at a central table in front of ministers and shadow ministers who sit on the front bench on their respective sides. Other members sit on the backbenches including smaller parties and/or independent members. Parliamentary officers and officials sit towards the top of the chamber with the exception of the Serjeant-at-Arms who sits towards the back.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SEATING PLAN



House composition

The House of Representatives of the 42nd Parliament comprises 150 members—each one representing one of Australia’s 150 electorates. Members are elected for three years, but may serve longer if, following a federal election, the member retains his or her seat in the Parliament. To check out all the current members of the House of Representatives go to Information about Members of the 42nd Parliament <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/index.htm>

A parliamentary party is a political party with at least one member elected to the Parliament of Australia. The party works together to form the government, opposition or a minor party. All members of the current House of Representatives belong to a party except three who are known as Independents. The composition of the current House of Representatives is described in the tables below. To find out more about all the political parties registered in Australia go to Political Parties and Organisations <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/pol/polparti.htm>

| | Political Party | Numbers | Total |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Government | Australian Labor Party (ALP) | 83 | 83 |
| Opposition coalition | Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) | 55 | 64 |
| | The Nationals (the NATS) | 9 | |
| | Independents (IND) | 3 | 3 |
| | Total | 150 | 150 |

This table can be expanded as follows:

| State | ALP | LPA | the NATS | IND | Total |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| NSW | 28 | 15 | 4 | 2 | 49 |
| VIC. | 21 | 14 | 2 | | 37 |
| QLD | 15 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 29 |
| SA | 6 | 5 | | | 11 |
| WA | 4 | 11 | | | 15 |
| TAS. | 5 | | | | 5 |
| NT | 2 | | | | 2 |
| ACT | 2 | | | | 2 |
| Australia | 83 | 55 | 9 | 3 | 150 |

House events

Bills

One of the major tasks of Parliament is to create laws. A proposed law is called a bill. A bill must be agreed to by both the Senate and the House of Representatives before it can become a law. To check the status of bills before the House of Representatives go to the Parliament of Australia Bills section

<http://www.aph.gov.au/bills/>

Business of the House

There are a number of things that take place in the House of Representatives on a sitting day. They include:

- proposed laws, known as bills, are debated and voted on (sometimes amendments are made to the proposed laws)
- issues of national importance are discussed
- votes, including divisions, are taken on matters before the House
- questions are asked of the Prime Minister and ministers during the period known as Question Time
- statements are made about issues relevant to members' constituents and electorates
- inquiries are initiated (or referred) to parliamentary committees
- reports and other documents are presented.

To find out what is happening in the House or Representatives right now go to the House Daily Program:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/daily/daily.pdf>

Committees

The House of Representatives establishes committees to scrutinise bills or investigate issues in greater detail. Public input is an important part of the committee process. To find out more, visit House of Representatives Committees <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee>

Sitting schedule

Both houses of Parliament hold meetings throughout the year—except during January and July—which are known as parliamentary sittings. To find out if the House of Representatives is sitting this week go to Scheduled Sitzings for 2010

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/sittings>

| 2010 PARLIAMENTARY CALENDAR 22 October 2009 | | 2010 PARLIAMENTARY CALENDAR 22 October 2009 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| JANUARY 2010 | FEBRUARY 2010 | JULY 2010 | AUGUST 2010 |
| S M T W T F S | S M T W T F S | S M T W T F S | S M T W T F S |
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| MARCH 2010 | APRIL 2010 | SEPTEMBER 2010 | OCTOBER 2010 |
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| 28 29 30 31 | 25 26 27 28 29 30 | 26 27 28 29 30 | 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 |
| MAY 2010 | JUNE 2010 | NOVEMBER 2010 | DECEMBER 2010 |
| S M T W T F S | S M T W T F S | S M T W T F S | S M T W T F S |
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| 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 | 27 28 29 30 | 28 29 30 | 26 27 28 29 30 31 |
| Public Holidays <input type="checkbox"/> Budget <input type="checkbox"/> Both Houses (proposed Senate) <input type="checkbox"/> | Public Holidays <input type="checkbox"/> Budget <input type="checkbox"/> Both Houses (proposed Senate) <input type="checkbox"/> | Public Holidays <input type="checkbox"/> Budget <input type="checkbox"/> Both Houses (proposed Senate) <input type="checkbox"/> | Public Holidays <input type="checkbox"/> Budget <input type="checkbox"/> Both Houses (proposed Senate) <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Senate Estimates (proposed) <input type="checkbox"/> Representatives <input type="checkbox"/> | Senate Estimates (proposed) <input type="checkbox"/> Representatives <input type="checkbox"/> | Senate Estimates (proposed) <input type="checkbox"/> Representatives <input type="checkbox"/> | Senate Estimates (proposed) <input type="checkbox"/> Representatives <input type="checkbox"/> |

PEO links

Do you want to know more about the federal Parliament?

The FAQ covers many frequently asked questions about the history, role and operation of the Parliament of Australia <http://www.peo.gov.au/faq/index.html>

The Parliamentary Glossary contains a collection of parliamentary definitions
<http://www.peo.gov.au/students/gloss.html>

The Fact Sheet Series is a comprehensive set of one page fact sheets on the federal Parliament
<http://www.peo.gov.au/students/fss/index.html>

Watch an online video series about how Parliament works
<http://www.peo.gov.au/multimedia/videos.html>

Other links

About the House http://www.aph.gov.au/house/house_news

House of Representatives: Members <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members>

Publications <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/pubs>

The House at Work <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/work>

Welcome to Australia's House of Representatives <http://www.aph.gov.au/house>

What's New <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/whatsnew.htm>