

Parliament NOW

Also available in this series are:

- House of Representatives NOW
- Senate NOW

Welcome to Parliament NOW—your departure point for current information about the 42nd federal Parliament—the place, the people and the processes which make it work.

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

- Australia’s Parliament House
- The Parliament of Australia
- The 42nd Parliament
- Australia’s head of state
- Parliamentary party leadership
- Chamber leadership
- Events in Parliament
- PEO links
- Other links

Australia’s Parliament House

Parliament House is an amazing kaleidoscope of people, things and events that are complex and constantly changing and that collectively reflect Australian history and culture.

Located in Canberra—the capital of Australia—Parliament House is the home of and main working building for Australia’s federal Parliament. As a meeting place the Parliament is visited by many officials and members of the public each year.

Parliament House was designed by Mitchell/Giurgola and Thorp Architects and was officially opened on 9 May 1988 by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The first sitting of Parliament was on 22 August 1988.



The building itself has many outstanding physical features, including:

- an Indigenous mosaic in the forecourt that symbolises a meeting place and the Australian continent
- the Senate and House of Representatives chambers with public galleries overlooking the chambers
- the Great Hall containing a large tapestry and Australian timbers
- a line of symmetry through the building that links with the surrounding Parliamentary Triangle precinct
- 4,500 meeting and working rooms for parliamentarians, support staff and visitors
- a press gallery that houses the major media representatives that work in and report on Parliament
- a significant art collection, encompassing paintings, sculptures, furniture and textiles.

The Parliament of Australia

The Australian Parliament is made up of the House of Representatives, the Senate and the Queen (represented by the Governor-General).

The Parliament has four main functions:

- making national laws

The Parliament of Australia



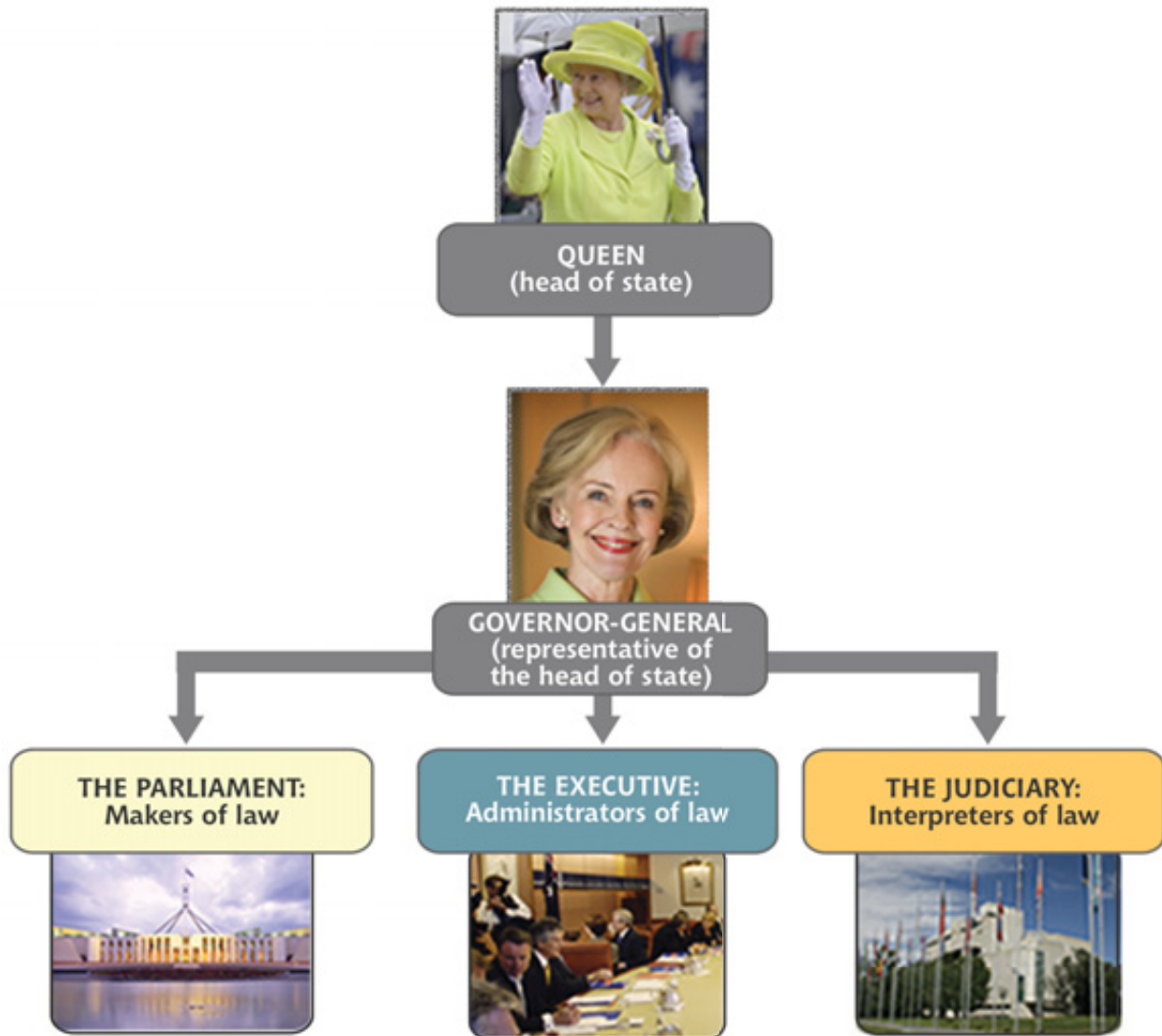
Parliament = House of Representatives + Senate + head of state

- representing the views of people living in Australia
- scrutinising the actions of government
- forming government from the party (or coalition of parties) which achieve a majority in the House of Representatives following a federal election.

Find out which bills are currently in the Parliament at BillsNet

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

GOVERNOR-GENERAL: Representative of the head of state



The Parliament is sometimes known as the Legislature, and works alongside the Executive (the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and government departments) and the Judiciary (Australian courts) to govern the country.

The 42nd Parliament

The current Parliament is the 42nd Parliament of Australia. This means that it is the 42nd parliament to be elected since Federation in 1901. The 42nd Parliament began following the last federal election held on 24 November 2007.

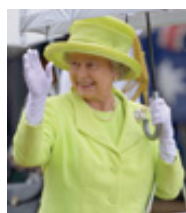
The current Parliament is made up of a total of 226 representatives popularly elected to the House of Representatives and the Senate. Of the 226 parliamentarians, 150 are members and 76 are senators. State senators elected on 24 November 2007 took up their positions in the Senate on 1 July 2008. However, senators who represent the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory took up their positions immediately after the last federal election.

The table below summarises a few of the characteristics of the current Parliament.*

Out of 226 federal parliamentarians, how many are:			
Under 30 years	1	Over 60 years	36
Non-indigenous	226	Indigenous	0
Male	159	Female	67
Born in Australia	198	Born overseas	28

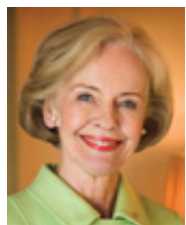
*As at 13 May 2008

According to section 28 of the Australian Constitution, federal elections must be held at least every three years. This means that the latest possible date for the next federal election is 16 April 2011.



Australia's head of state

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is Australia's head of state and is formally recognised as the leader of the nation. On the advice of the Australian Prime Minister, the Queen appoints the Governor-General to act on her behalf.



The current Governor-General of Australia is Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC. The Governor-General acts as the Queen's representative in Australia and carries out duties including signing bills passed by the federal Parliament into law, appointing judges and government ministers, dissolving and opening the Parliament and acting as Commander in Chief of the armed forces.

Parliamentary party leadership

Currently, 222 of 226 federal parliamentarians belong to political parties.

Three Independents (who do not belong to a political party) sit in the House of Representatives. There is one Independent senator.

Federal parliamentary parties elect leaders to act as a spokesperson for their party and to lead the party in developing policies. The two largest political parties in the current Parliament are the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal Party of Australia (LPA). Smaller parties include the Nationals (the NATS) who are in coalition with the Liberal Party of Australia, the Australian Greens (AG), Family First Party (FFP) and the Country Liberal Party (CLP).



The current leader of the Australian Labor Party is the Hon. Kevin Rudd MP. Mr Rudd is also the Prime Minister of Australia.



The current leader of the Liberal Party of Australia is the Hon. Tony Abbott MP. Mr Abbott is also the Leader of the Opposition.



The current leader of The Nationals is the Hon. Warren Truss MP.



The current leader of the Australian Greens is Senator Bob Brown.



The current leader of the Family First Party is Senator Steve Fielding.

Chamber leadership

In addition to their duties as elected members and senators, some parliamentarians have additional responsibilities both within their parties and in day-to-day chamber proceedings.

House of Representatives



The current Speaker of the House of Representatives is Mr Harry Jenkins MP.



The current Prime Minister is the Hon. Kevin Rudd MP.



The current Leader of the Opposition is the Hon. Tony Abbott MP



The current Deputy Prime Minister is the Hon. Julia Gillard MP.



The current Deputy Opposition Leader is the Hon. Julie Bishop MP.

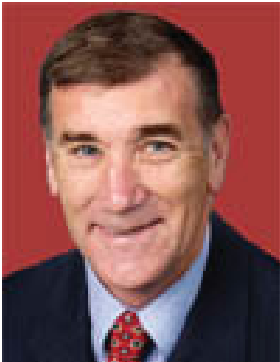


The current Leader of the House and Manager of Government Business in the House is the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP.



The current Manager of Opposition Business in the House is the Hon. Christopher Pyne MP.

Senate



The current President of the Senate is Senator the Hon. John Hogg.



The current Leader of the Government in the Senate is Senator the Hon. Christopher Evans.



The current Leader of the Opposition in the Senate is Senator the Hon. Nick Minchin.



The current Manager of Government Business in the Senate is Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig.







The current Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate is Senator Stephen Parry.

Parliamentary officers provide important assistance to members and senators in both chambers and in their wider parliamentary duties.

The Senate and the House of Representatives each have a clerk, who is the most senior non-elected official in the chamber. The Clerk assists the Speaker or the President to manage chamber proceedings, provides advice to parliamentarians and records decisions of the Parliament.

The Serjeant-at-Arms in the House of Representatives looks after the Speaker and members of the House. In this capacity the Serjeant-at-Arms gives advice, maintains building security and provides office facilities.

The Usher of the Black Rod in the Senate looks after the President and senators. In this capacity the Usher of the Black Rod gives advice, maintains building security and provides office facilities.

House of Representatives	Senate
 <p>The current Clerk of the House of Representatives is Mr Bernard Wright.</p>	 <p>The current Clerk of the Senate is Dr Rosemary Laing.</p>
 <p>The current Serjeant-at-Arms is Mr David Elder.</p>	 <p>The current Usher of the Black Rod is Mr Brien Hallett.</p>

To find out more about the people in Parliament go to Who's Who in Parliament <http://www.aph.gov.au/whoswho>

Events in Parliament

Parliament House is a busy and vibrant place. It is not only the home of the federal Parliament, but in keeping with its role as the meeting place of the nation, the Parliament opens its doors to the public and hosts a wide variety of visitors and events every year. To find out what happened this week in Parliament go to This Week in Parliament <http://www.aph.gov.au/thisweek>

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 current Parliament go to Parliament of Australia Bills <http://www.aph.gov.au/bills/>

The Budget

The annual Budget presentation and speech by the federal Treasurer takes place in the Parliament every May. The Budget outlines the government's annual plan for collecting and spending money across Australia. This is an important event and is closely scrutinised and analysed by the press gallery in Parliament House. Go to the Australian Government budget website for more details <http://www.budget.gov.au>

Committees

Parliamentary committees are established by the Parliament to scrutinise bills or investigate issues in greater detail. Public input is an important part of the committee process. To find out more about parliamentary committees visit Parliament of Australia Committees <http://www.aph.gov.au/committee>

Concerts

Parliament House plays host to numerous events throughout the year including the annual Australia Day Live concert, at which the Prime Minister announces the Australian of the Year in several categories. Go to Australia Day Live for more details about this event <http://www.australiadaylive.gov.au>

Council of Australian Governments

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, state premiers, territory chief ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. COAG meets regularly at Parliament House. Visit the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) website for more information <http://www.coag.gov.au>

Estimates

Senate estimates committees meet twice a year to scrutinise how the government has spent the Budget funds and to question government ministers and senior public servants from government departments. To find out what's happening visit Senate estimates <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/estimates>

Visitors

Parliament House is visited by over one million people a year including around 90,000 students, here to learn about how the Parliament works. Official overseas guests, including royalty, heads of government and parliamentary delegates, often visit Parliament House and the chambers, while a regular Open Day permits other visitors a behind the scenes tour of Parliament House. This is an opportunity to see how the building and its many occupants operate each day. To find out more about visiting Australia's Parliament House go to Parliament of Australia Visitors <http://www.aph.gov.au/visitors>

PEO links

Do you want to know more about the federal Parliament?

FAQ: 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>

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

Fact Sheet Series: 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>

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

Other links

Parliament an Overview <http://www.aph.gov.au/parl.htm>

Handbook of the 42nd Parliament <http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/handbook>

Australian Electoral Commission, Elections—frequently asked questions <http://www.aec.gov.au/FAQs/Elections.htm>

Parliament: broadcast live online <http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

What's new in the Parliament <http://www.aph.gov.au/whatsnew.htm>