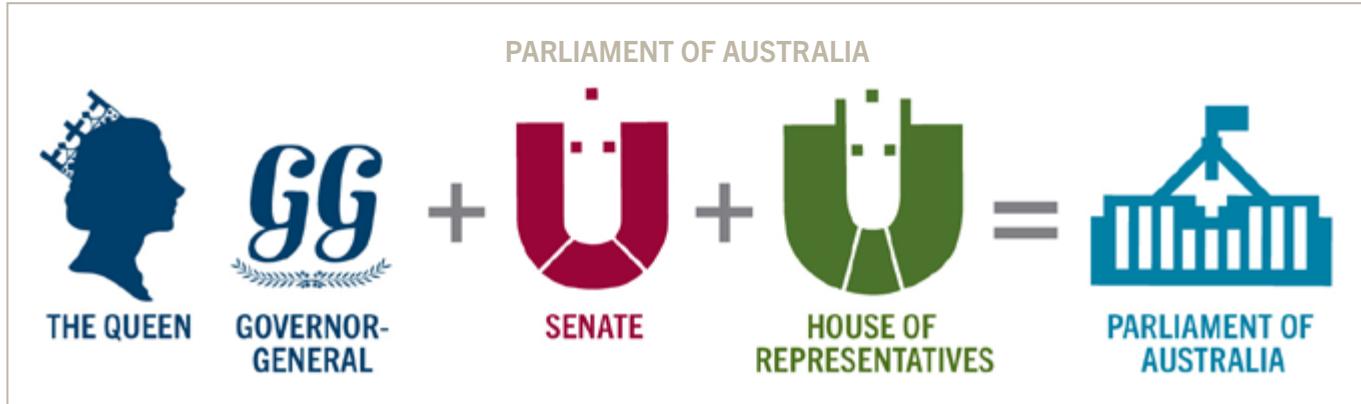


HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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

The Australian Parliament is bicameral, which means there are two houses. The House of Representatives is also known as the lower house.

Role

There are 150 members elected to the House of Representatives. Each member represents one of Australia's 150 electorates. On average, 150 000 people live in each electorate, with an average of 100 000 voters.

The Australian Government is formed in the House of Representatives, from the party, or coalition of parties, with the support of the majority of members in the House.

Members of the House of Representatives:

- represent the views of Australians and discuss matters of national and international importance
- make and change federal law, by debating and voting on bills (proposed laws). A bill must be agreed to in identical form in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and given Royal Assent by the Governor-General. It then becomes a law
- scrutinise (closely examine) the work of the government, especially in Question Time and through parliamentary committees.

(See *Members of the House of Representatives*).

Appearance

The furnishings and carpet in the House of Representatives are green. This signifies our traditional link with the green decoration of the House of Commons in the British Parliament. The grey-green tones used in the House of Representatives are soft shades, typical of the Australian eucalypt landscape.

The seats in the House of Representatives are arranged in rows to form a U-shape. The Speaker who runs the chamber sits at the open end of the U-shape (see *Speaker of the House of Representatives*). Government members sit to the right of the Speaker and opposition members sit to the left. The Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition sit in front of their respective teams at a central table. Minor parties and Independents sit in the central curved part of the U-shape.

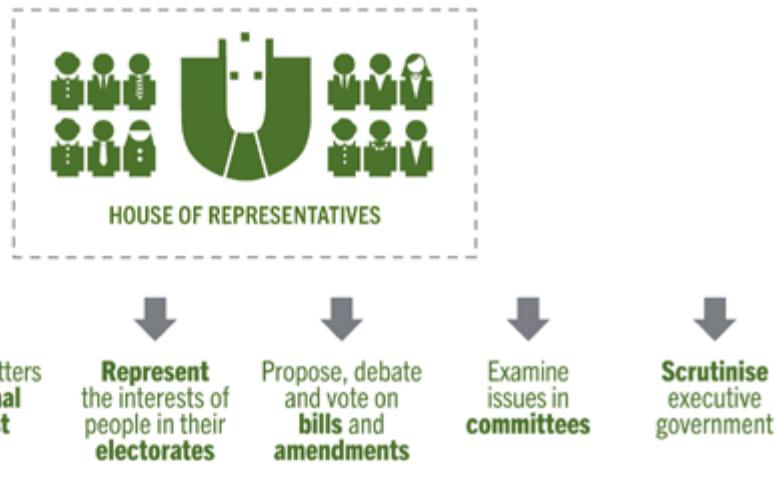
The House of Representatives has three raised viewing galleries. One is directly above the Speaker and is reserved for the press gallery (see *Press Gallery*). The other galleries on either side of the chamber are open to the public. Members of the press gallery and the public may visit the chamber at any time.



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The House of Representatives

THE ROLE OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Federation Chamber

The Federation Chamber is the second chamber of the House of Representatives, which can operate at the same time as the House. All members of the House can attend the Federation Chamber. It has a similar layout to the House, with U-shaped seating for members as well as seating for the media, public and advisors.

This chamber was set up in 1994 as the Main Committee, and renamed as the Federation Chamber in February 2012. It was established to streamline the House's busy schedule and to increase the time available for conducting non-controversial business. Despite its original name, the Federation Chamber does not hold parliamentary committees. Its work includes:

- debating bills on which there is expected to be agreement
- debating committee reports
- conducting private members' business, which allows members to speak on any topic, particularly matters in their electorate.

The rules used in the Federation Chamber are almost identical to those used in the House, although divisions (formal parliamentary votes) are not held in the Federation Chamber. If a decision requires a division it must be referred back to the House. All decisions made in the Federation Chamber are reported to the House of Representatives before moving to the next stage. When a division is called in the House of Representatives, activities in the Federation Chamber are suspended so that members can go to the House to vote.

Federation Chamber meetings are chaired by the Deputy Speaker of the House or members of the Speaker's panel. The Federation Chamber can function with a quorum (minimum number) of only three members, including the chair.

Reporting

Parliamentary proceedings are recorded and broadcast on ABC TV and radio, A-PAC (Australian Public Affairs Channel) and on the internet at www.aph.gov.au. Hansard reporters produce a daily record of all that is said in the House of Representatives and Federation Chamber. This record is available on the internet.

History

The physical appearance of the House of Representatives and some of its practices are derived from the British Parliament. However, the drafters of the Australian Constitution also looked to the United States (US) Congress when deciding on the form of the Australian Parliament. For example, the names 'House of Representatives' and 'Senate' were borrowed from the US system. Although the House of Representatives has links with both the British Parliament and the US Congress, it has developed its own unique style and procedures over the last century.

LINKS

APH website

Parliament House virtual tour
virtualtour.aph.gov.au

House of Representatives Infosheet: *The House, Government and Opposition*
www.tinyurl.com/Infosheet19

House of Representatives Infosheet: *A typical sitting day*
www.tinyurl.com/Infosheet2

House of Representatives Infosheet: *The Federation Chamber*
www.tinyurl.com/Infosheet16