Executive government includes the Prime Minister and ministers (see Ministers and Shadow Ministers). Cabinet is a group within the executive government consisting of the Prime Minister and top-level ministers. According to the Ministers of State Act 1952, there can be no more than 30 ministers in executive government. Cabinet typically includes about 17 ministers and is the main decision-making group within executive government.

**Role**

Cabinet’s role is to direct government policy and make decisions about national issues. Cabinet ministers spend a lot of time discussing current national problems and how these can be solved.

In Cabinet meetings, ministers also present bills (proposed laws) from their government departments. Cabinet examines these bills, especially the costs, and recommends to ministers whether bills should proceed to Parliament or changes should be made. Sometimes Cabinet sets up a sub-committee of ministers to examine an issue in greater detail.

**Operation**

Cabinet is not mentioned in the Australian Constitution. It is not defined by law and exists in the Australian system of government based on tradition and past practice.

Each government decides how Cabinet will operate. The Prime Minister chairs Cabinet and, as a result, has a strong influence on how Cabinet works. Some prime ministers have used a majority vote in Cabinet to decide on an issue. Other prime ministers have preferred to try to reach a consensus decision.

All Cabinet discussions are secret, so that ministers can speak freely about any issue, including highly confidential matters such as national security. Once Cabinet has made a decision, all Cabinet ministers are expected to support the decision publicly. This is known as Cabinet solidarity. Cabinet records are kept secret for twenty to thirty years.

The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet provides the technical, legal and other expert advice for the Cabinet to operate effectively.

**Accountability**

Cabinet is accountable to Parliament for the running of the government. The Parliament scrutinises (closely examines) the executive government during Question Time each day in the House of Representatives and the Senate, by asking ministers questions about government decisions.

**Cabinet meetings**

Cabinet meets on a regular basis, often weekly. Meetings may be held in the Cabinet Room in Australia’s Parliament House, or in community settings across Australia.

The Cabinet Room is located in Parliament House opposite the Prime Minister’s office and close to ministers’ offices. The room is highly secure. Mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices cannot be used. High security is essential because the Cabinet discusses confidential and secret matters that affect the well-being of the nation.

Usually, only Cabinet ministers attend Cabinet meetings. Sometimes non-Cabinet ministers or people with expert knowledge are invited to attend, to discuss a bill or an issue that Cabinet is considering.