



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

## QUESTIONS

### Questions to Ministers

One way in which Members can hold the Government accountable is by questioning Ministers. Numerous opportunities exist for Members to ask questions of Ministers, most notably:

- in the Chamber during Question Time
- through Written Questions placed on the Written Question Paper
- during committee hearings
- during the Consideration in Detail stage of the legislative process.

Questions are usually addressed to a Minister and relate to public affairs or matters of administration that the Minister is responsible for. Questions may also be addressed to other Members in the following circumstances:

- to any Member relating to any bill, motion or other matter connected with the business of the Assembly of which the Member has charge
- to the Chair of a committee relating to the activities of that committee
- to the Speaker in relation to matters for which they have responsibility.

### Rules for questions

The rules for questions are interpreted by the Speaker and aim to not limit the ability of Members to ask questions on a wide variety of subjects. The Speaker has discretion to allow the inclusion in a question of any material necessary to make the question clearer.

The prohibitions on questions recognise that the purpose of a

question is to seek information and not to provide a Member the opportunity to make a statement.

### Question Time

Question Time is scheduled in the Routine of Business each Meeting Day at 2.00 pm, following Notices and Petitions, for a period of one hour.

Questions asked at Question Time are 'without notice', although a Member may give a Minister advance notice of a question if the answer requires a level of detail.

Question Time is drawn to a close each day by the Leader of Government Business asking 'that further questions be placed on the Written Question Paper'.

### Allocation of questions

A Member seeks the call during Question Time by rising in their place to address the Speaker. However, in practice the Speaker allocates questions evenly by alternating between the parties and independent Members.

### Time limits for questions and answers

Time limits apply to the asking and answering of questions:

- questions may not exceed one minute
- answers may not exceed three minutes
- supplementary questions may not exceed 30 seconds
- answers to supplementary questions may not exceed one minute.

### SUMMARY

Members can hold the Government accountable by questioning Ministers.

Questions are usually addressed to a Minister and relate to public affairs or matters of administration which the Minister has responsibility for.

Questions may also be addressed to other Members in the following circumstances:

- to the Speaker in relation to matters for which they have responsibility
- to the Chair of a committee relating to the activities of that committee
- any Member relating to any business of the Assembly of which the Member has charge of.

Questions asked at Question Time are 'without notice'. Where a Member seeks a detailed answer to a question that question is more appropriately submitted in written form.

### Supplementary questions

Following a response to a question, a Member who asked the original question may seek the call to ask a supplementary question.

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Supplementary questions must relate to or arise from the answer to the original question.

Only one supplementary question may be asked per Question Time.

### Answers to questions

In answering a question, a Member may not debate it. An answer must be confined to providing the information sought. The answer must be succinct, concise and directly relevant to the question. The Speaker may require that an answer be relevant, but cannot tell Ministers how they should respond to questions. In practice, the Speaker gives Ministers answering a question latitude.

### Taking questions on notice and providing further answers

When responding to questions during Question Time, Members may elect to take a question or part of a question on notice. The Member will seek further information and provide it to the Assembly at a later time. It is the practice at the end of Question Time for a Member to respond to prior questions that they have taken on notice.

### Written questions

Where a Member seeks a detailed answer to a question, particularly where statistical information is sought, that question is more appropriately submitted in written form and placed on the Written Question Paper.

A Member places a question on the Written Question Paper by signing the written question and delivering it to the Clerk. There is no limit on the number of questions a Member may submit.

The Clerk examines questions for conformity with Standing Orders before placing them on the Written Question Paper. Any problems with questions are discussed with the Member's Office. If they cannot be resolved they are referred to the Speaker for determination.

Each question is allocated a number and published in the Written Question Paper.

Written questions and answers are available here:

[parliament.nt.gov.au/business/written-questions](http://parliament.nt.gov.au/business/written-questions)

### The 30 day rule

Standing Order 114 provides that a Written Question should be responded to by a Minister within 30 days of receipt. If a response is not made within 30 days, the Member asking the question may, at the conclusion of Question Time, ask the Speaker to write to the Minister to provide an explanation.