



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

## VOTING IN THE CHAMBER

Questions are decided by a majority. The Speaker is entitled to vote, and also has a casting vote. This means where there is a tie on any question the vote of the Speaker decides the matter.

### Determining the vote

Most votes in the Assembly are determined on the voices. The Speaker puts the question, Members vote by calling 'Aye' or 'No', and the Speaker declares the result based on an assessment of whether the ayes or noes are in the majority. This assessment is based on knowledge of how many Members vote either way, not which side is the loudest. The Speaker's call may be challenged by Members calling for a division.

### Divisions

If more than one Member challenges the Speaker's decision by calling 'Division', the Speaker informs the Chamber that a division is required and orders that the bells be rung. The bells are rung for three minutes to allow Members to assemble in the Chamber. At the completion of the three minutes, the Speaker orders that the doors be locked. Although the doors are not physically locked, no Member may enter or leave the Chamber.

The Members cast their votes by moving to the right of the Speaker if they wish to vote aye and to the left of the Speaker if they wish to vote no. Once the doors are locked, all Members in the Chamber must vote, except for the Speaker, who may choose not to vote. Other Members have the option of abstaining by not attending the division.

The Government and Opposition Whips assist the Clerks at the Table to count the votes, one for the ayes and one for the noes. The result is recorded by the Clerks at the Table who note each Member's name on a list as they are called by the tellers. When all names have been recorded, the Clerks provide the list to the Speaker, who announces the result.

Lists of Members voting for and against a motion are reproduced in the *Minutes of Proceedings* and the *Parliamentary Record*.

### Pairs

Pairing is an unofficial arrangement managed by the party whips to preserve the voting strengths of the parties. A Member who is expected to vote on one side but is absent is paired with a Member who is expected to vote on the other side and is also absent, or who refrains from voting.

### Questions determined by absolute majorities

A decision to suspend Standing Orders without notice is the only vote that must be passed by an absolute majority of the Assembly. This means such votes require more than half of the Assembly to vote for them to be passed. Currently, that means 13 Members of the Assembly must vote for the motion.

### Secret ballots

Most questions in the Assembly are determined openly. However, the Standing Orders provide for secret ballots to be taken whenever the Assembly thinks fit.

In practice, the only times a secret ballot is taken is for the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker.