

# A - Z OF PARLIAMENT



## **act (of Parliament)**

A law made by a parliament which has received assent by the Governor-General (for Commonwealth acts), Governor (for state acts), or the Administrator (for Northern Territory acts). An act is called a bill before it has received assent.

## **adjourn**

To put off, postpone or suspend.

## **adjournment debate**

A debate at the end of each sitting day of a house of parliament where members may make speeches on any topic.

## **Administrator**

The person appointed by the Governor-General to represent the Monarch in governing the Northern Territory.

## **amendment**

An alteration (to a bill, an act, a constitution, etc).

## **annual report**

A written account of the most important events or activities done by a government department or authority. The report is presented each year to the parliament.

## **assembly** (also see Legislative Assembly)

A number of people gathered together for a special purpose.

## **assent**

The signing of a bill by the Administrator (on behalf of the Governor-General) which is the last step in making a bill into an act in the Northern Territory. (See also Royal Assent.)

## **Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)**

An organisation that runs national elections and referendums (e.g. registering voters and maintaining electoral rolls) and gives people information about elections.

## **aye**

The word used for voting 'yes' in parliament.

## **backbench**

Members of parliament who are not ministers or shadow ministers; also the seats in the Chamber where such members sit. A **backbencher** is a member who is not a minister or shadow minister.

## **ballot**

A paper filled in to record a vote; to select by a secret vote; or the process by which a choice is made.

A **ballot box** is a box in which voters put their ballot papers. A **ballot paper** is a paper which lists the names of the people (candidates) who are seeking a place in government and on which the voter marks his or her choices.

## **bar of the house**

A barrier at the entrance to the Chamber beyond which only members may pass.

**bells**

Electronic bells rung to call members into the Chamber at the beginning of a sitting, because a vote is to be taken, or because there are not enough members present.

**bicameral**

A parliament with two houses – an upper and a lower house.

**bill**

A proposal for a new law which has been presented to parliament. A bill has to go through many stages to become an act (law).

**by-election**

An election to fill the seat of a member of the House of Representatives, Legislative Assembly or a council because the member has died or vacated their seat. There may be a by-election for more than one seat held at any one time.

**Cabinet**

The group of senior ministers in a government or all the ministers in the Northern Territory Government which is responsible for the government's policy development and implementation.

**campaign**

Activities by candidates, political party members or supporters, aimed at getting people to vote for a particular candidate.

**candidate**

A person who stands for election.

**caretaker (government)**

When an election has been called, no decisions or new policies can be announced or undertaken because the parliament has been closed down pending the election. Caretaker principles state that if a decision or action must be made, the Prime Minister (or Chief Minister) will confer with the Leader of the Opposition.

**cast a vote**

To make a choice between candidates by filling in a ballot paper or by some other means.

**casting vote**

A single vote given by the Speaker of a lower house or President of an upper house if the number of votes for a bill is equal, and which therefore decides the matter.

**censure motion**

A motion moved in a parliament which is very critical of, and which seeks to attach blame to, a minister, another member, or the government.

**Chairman / Chair of Committees**

A member of parliament who is in charge of the Committee of the Whole - a committee, usually formed to consider a bill in detail, consisting of all the members of a house of parliament.

**Chamber**

The meeting room of a house of parliament in which the members meet and participate in debates.

**Chief Minister**

The head of the Northern Territory Government.

**Clerk**

The most senior permanent (non-elected) administrative officer of a parliament. The Clerk records all decisions made in the Chamber and advises the Speaker on procedural matters and practices of the house. The Clerk is assisted by a Deputy Clerk.

**coalition**

The joining together of two or more groups or political parties usually to form a government or an opposition.

**Commonwealth**

A separate community or state (e.g. the Commonwealth of Australia); or a group of countries or peoples united by a common interest (e.g. the Commonwealth of Nations).

**conscience vote**

A vote in parliament where members are free to vote according to their own judgment or beliefs and not necessarily according to the guidelines, policies or decisions of their political party.

**constituency**

The electorate or area, or the people in it, which a member of parliament represents.

**constitution**

The set of basic rules by which a country or state is governed. The **Australian Constitution** is the set of rules by which Australian is run and it took effect on 1 January 1901. It includes details about composition of federal parliament, how parliament works, how the state and federal parliaments share power and the role of the High Court.

**crossbenches**

A set of seats in the Chamber for members of parliament who belong to neither the government nor the opposition parties; seats for minor parties and independents.

**crossing the floor**

When members of the government or opposition defect and vote with the other side. They physically move to the other side of the chamber in a division and so 'cross the floor' of the Chamber.

**debate**

A formal discussion on a bill or other topic in which different views are put.

**declaration of the poll**

An announcement of the results of voting at an election.

**democracy**

Government by the people (a way of governing a country in which the people elect representatives to form a government on their behalf); or a country with such a government; or the idea that everyone in a country has equal rights.

**department**

A group of public servants organised to administer a particular area of government activity under the control of a minister of the government.

**dispatch boxes**

Two ornamental boxes which lie on the Table of the House of Representatives and the Legislative Assembly.

**division**

The separation of the members of a parliament into two groups, for and against, so that their votes can be counted; also the name of each Legislative Assembly electorate.

**donkey vote**

Vote where an elector appears to make no choice at all among the candidates, usually by numbering preferences for candidates in the order in which they are listed on the ballot paper.

**election**

The choosing of a person or government representatives by voting.

**elector**

A person who votes or who is eligible to vote.

**electoral roll**

A list of the names of all the people who are entitled to vote in an election.

**electorate**

An area represented by a member of parliament also known as a constituency; the group of people who live in an area represented by a member of parliament; or all the people who have the right to vote in an election.

**electorate office**

The office in a member of parliament's electorate where the member can work when parliament is not sitting.

**endorsed** (candidate)

A person who has received official backing to represent a party or group at an election.

**executive**

The branch of government which carries out or administers the laws; people from the governing party who make policy and control government departments, and who are answerable to parliament for the way they run the government.

**executive government**

The ministers, supported by public servants, who administer the affairs of a country or state.

**federal**

The Australian national parliament or government.

**federation**

The forming of a nation by the union of a number of states which give up some of their powers and responsibilities to a national government.

**first-past-the-post**

A way of voting in which the candidate who gets the largest number of votes wins, even if it is less than half the votes cast.

**first reading**

The first stage in the progress through parliament of a bill, when the Clerk reads aloud - for the first time - the long title of a bill, usually straight after it is presented to the parliament.

**floor**

The enclosed area containing members' seats in a chamber of parliament.

**formal (vote)**

In counting votes for an election, a ballot paper which is counted because it has been filled in correctly, for example, all squares have been numbered.

**frontbench**

Members of parliament who are ministers or shadow ministers; or the seats in the Chamber where such members sit. A **frontbencher** is a member of the ministry or shadow ministry who occupy the front seats in the Chamber.

**general election**

An election for all the seats in the House of Representatives or the Legislative Assembly.

**government**

The party or coalition with the largest majority of elected representatives in parliament; or the group of people who control or govern a country or state.

**Governor**

The representative of the Monarch in an Australian state.

**Governor-General**

The representative of the Monarch in Australia at the federal level.

**Hansard**

The written record of speeches made by members of parliament; the printed record of the debates in parliament; or the people who produce the printed record of the debates in parliament.

**Head of State**

In the Australian system, the King or Queen of England.

**Honourable (Member or Senator)**

A title of members of parliament who are ministers, and for certain other persons, such as the Speaker of a house of representatives or the President of a senate. Not all ministers choose to use the title.

**house (of parliament)**

A separate part of a law-making body, for example the Senate or the House of Representatives in Australian Parliament or the Legislative Assembly, House of Assembly or Legislative Council at the state and territory level.

**House of Commons**

The lower house of parliament in the United Kingdom.

**House of Lords**

The upper house of parliament in the United Kingdom.

**House of Representatives**

The lower house of the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia. The name is adopted from the United States equivalent but with a different role.

**how-to-vote card**

A card or piece of paper handed out at an election by a political party or candidate showing an elector how the party or candidate would prefer the voter to mark his or her ballot paper.

**independent (member or senator)**

A member of parliament who does not belong to a political party.

**informal vote**

In an election, a ballot paper which is not counted because it has not been filled in correctly.

**Leader of Government Business**

In the Northern Territory, the government member who arranges and manages government business in the Legislative Assembly.

**Leader of the Opposition**

The leader of the party which is the second largest in numbers in the House of Representatives or the Legislative Assembly.

**legislation**

A law or a set of laws; or the making of laws.

**Legislative Assembly**

The parliament of the Northern Territory; the name given to the lower houses of parliament in Australian states except South Australia and Tasmania which are known as the House of Assembly

**Legislative Council**

The name given to the upper houses of parliament in Australian states; the name given to the governing body in Northern Territory from 1948 – 1974 prior to Self-Government.

**lobby**

A group of people trying to get support for a particular cause; to approach people for support; or an entrance hall or corridor.

**local government**

The management of the affairs of a municipality or shire by people who are elected by residents of that area; or the people who make up such a management group, usually called a council.

**long title** (or title of a bill)

The full title of a bill which sets out briefly the purpose or scope of the bill.

**Lord Mayor** (or Mayor)

A title conferred on the head of a capital city council.

**lower house**

A house of a two-chamber parliament usually having more members than the upper house and whose members represent electorates with similar numbers of voters. It is known as the House of Representatives in the Commonwealth Parliament and Legislative Assembly or House of Assembly in the parliaments of the states and territories.

**mace**

Once a weapon of war shaped like a club and the symbol of royal authority but is now the symbol of authority of a lower house of parliament and its Speaker.

**matter of public importance**

A subject for discussion which is suggested to a house of parliament by a senator or member, and which must be supported by a certain number of other senators or members before it can be discussed.

**member**

A person elected to the House of Representatives, the Legislative Assembly, or local government.

**minister**

A member of parliament who is a member of the executive government and who is responsible for a portfolio area and usually in charge of a government department.

**ministerial accountability**

The requirement that a minister can be called upon to explain in parliament his or her actions and those of the department and agencies under his or her control.

**ministerial statement**

A statement made by a minister to a house of parliament, often used to announce the government's policies and decisions.

**minority government**

A minority government is formed when the governing political party or coalition of parties does not have a majority (more than 50%) of overall seats in the parliament. It is also known as a hung parliament.

**MLA**

Member of the Legislative Assembly.

**Monarch**

A sole ruler of a country who usually inherits the position, such as a king or queen.

**motion**

An idea or proposal put forward at a meeting for consideration, debate and decision.

**move** (a motion)

To make a formal proposal at a meeting.

**municipality**

A town or city district which has its own local government council.

**no confidence** (motion or vote of)

A means by which a parliament expresses dissatisfaction with the performance of a government or a minister.

**no**

The word used for voting 'no' in parliament. The total number of these votes is known as 'the noes'.

**Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC)**

An organisation that conducts Northern Territory elections and referendums, registers voters, maintains electoral rolls, and gives people information about elections.

**notice paper**

The document issued each sitting day which lists all business before a house of parliament.

**opposition**

The second largest political party or coalition of parties after the government party in the House of Representatives or the Legislative Assembly. They have alternative views about policies or actions (party platform), and stand ready to form a government should the voters so decide at a future election.

**parliament**

In Australia, an assembly of elected representatives which, with the Head of State (represented by the Governor-General, Governor or Administrator), makes laws for the country, state or territory.

**parliamentary committee**

A small group of members of parliament, usually drawn from all parties (and sometimes independent members), which studies, reports on and makes recommendations about a particular subject.

**parliamentary democracy**

A system of government in which the people exercise their power to govern through their elected representatives in parliament.

**parliamentary procedure**

Rules for and methods of carrying out the business of a house of parliament.

**Parliament House**

The building where a parliament meets and where ministers usually work.

**petition**

A document presented to a house of parliament by a person or group of people, via a member of parliament, asking for action on a matter.

**platform**

A set of policies, ideology, or beliefs of a political party or independent.



**policy**

A particular set of beliefs or a plan of action on a matter.

**political party**

A group of people with similar ideas or aims where some members stand at elections in the hope they will be able to form the government.

**poll**

An election; a count of people, votes or opinions; to ask and record opinions; to receive a number of votes.

**polling day**

The day on which people vote in an election.

**polling place**

Place or centre where electors can attend to cast their vote for an election.

**polling screen**

A small compartment or cubicle where people fill in their ballot papers in secret at elections.

**portfolio**

The area of responsibility or duties of a minister in a government; the department or agency for which a minister is responsible.

**preferences**

A ranking of candidates. A first preference is the elector's first choice, second preference is the second choice (etc).

**preferential voting**

A system of voting in which a voter shows an order of preference for candidates, giving the number one to his or her first choice (and so on) with the last number to the last choice.

**pre-selection**

The process where a political party decides who, from a selection of people, will be chosen as candidates to stand for that party at an election.

**press gallery**

An area overlooking the Chamber set aside for reporters from newspapers, radio and television.

**Prime Minister**

The head of the national government in some countries, including Australia.

**private member**

A member of parliament who is not a minister.

**proportional representation**

A voting system, such as that used in senate elections, designed to make sure that the number of successful candidates from a party or group reflects as closely as possible the total vote for that party or group as a proportion of all the formal votes cast in an election.

**prorogue**

To defer, postpone or discontinue a session of parliament because an election is forthcoming.

**public gallery**

An area in a house of parliament overlooking the Chamber set aside for the public.

**question time**

A period of time each day in parliament where ministers are asked questions concerning their responsibilities by other members.

**redistribution**

A review of the number of electors in each electorate which may result in the boundaries of some electorates being changed in order to make sure elector numbers are approximately equal.

**referendum**

A vote by electors on an important issue, usually where the options for the elector are 'yes' or 'no'. A federal referendum in Australia is nearly always a vote to alter the Australian Constitution.

**remonstrance**

A protest or complaint; a document describing certain points or listing complaints or grievances.

**representative**

A person who acts on behalf of others; a person elected to a law-making body.

**responsible government**

A system of government answerable to elected representatives of the people for its actions.

**Royal Assent**

The signing of a bill by the Monarch's representative (the Governor-General for federal bills or the Governor for state bills) which is the last step in making a bill into an act. In the Northern Territory, the Administrator can only give assent as they do not directly represent the Monarch.

**seat**

A member's place in a house of parliament; or an electorate or constituency.

**second reading** (of a bill)

The second stage of the passage of a bill through a parliament at which time discussion on the principle or purpose of the bill takes place.

**secret ballot**

Voting in a private screen or compartment where no other person can see how the elector is marking their ballot paper.

**Self-Government**

The *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978* established a fully elected Legislative Assembly in the Northern Territory and meant Territorians were able to make most decisions about how the Territory should be governed.

**Senate**

The upper house of the Commonwealth Parliament with 76 senators, 12 from each of the six states and two each from the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. The senate is also known as the States' House or the House of Review.

**senator**

A member of the Australian Senate.

**Serjeant-at-Arms**

In the House of Representatives and Legislative Assembly, an official who carries the mace and helps keep order in Parliament House.

**shadow minister**

The members of the main opposition party or parties in a parliament who are party spokespersons in areas which usually match the areas of responsibility of ministers in the government.

**shire**

A local government council often servicing a rural area.

**short title** (of a bill)

The name of a bill by which it is commonly known.

**sitting**

A meeting of a house of parliament.

**Speaker**

The member elected by the House of Representatives or the Legislative Assembly as its chairperson.

**standing committee**

A group of members appointed by a parliament to inquire into and report on certain matters. A standing committee exists for the life of a parliament and is usually reappointed in succeeding parliaments.

**standing orders**

The permanent rules which govern the conduct of business in a house of parliament.

**statutory authority**

A government organisation set up by an act of parliament, mostly independent of day-to-day ministerial control and usually not bound by public service procedures to the same extent as ordinary agencies or departments, and which is responsible to parliament.

**Table**

The central T-shaped table in a chamber of parliament; to present a document to a house of parliament.

**territory**

In Australia's federal system of government, an area which has not been given the full rights of a state and which comes under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth or a state.

**third reading** (of a bill)

The final stage in the passage of a bill through a house of parliament.

**Treasurer**

The government minister responsible for economic and financial policy, and who prepares the government's budget; the minister in charge of the treasury.

**unicameral**

A parliament with one house, usually the lower house (Legislative Assembly).

**upper house**

The second chamber of parliament; the Senate in the Commonwealth Parliament and the Legislative Council in states (except Queensland).

**vote**

A formal expression of a choice, such as putting one's hand up or marking a ballot paper.

**Westminster**

The Houses of Parliament in London; or the city of Westminster in London where the Houses of Parliament (the Palace of Westminster) are located.

**Westminster system**

A system of government originating in Britain, the main features of which are: a head of state who is not the head of government and an executive which is drawn from, and which is directly responsible to, the parliament (the parliament is supreme).

**whip**

A party manager in parliament who is responsible for organising members of his or her party to take part in debates and votes, and who assists in arranging the business of a house of parliament.

**writ** (for an election)

A formal order issued by the Governor-General (in the House of Representatives), Governors (for states) and the Administrator (in the Northern Territory) requiring that an election be held.