

Parliament House

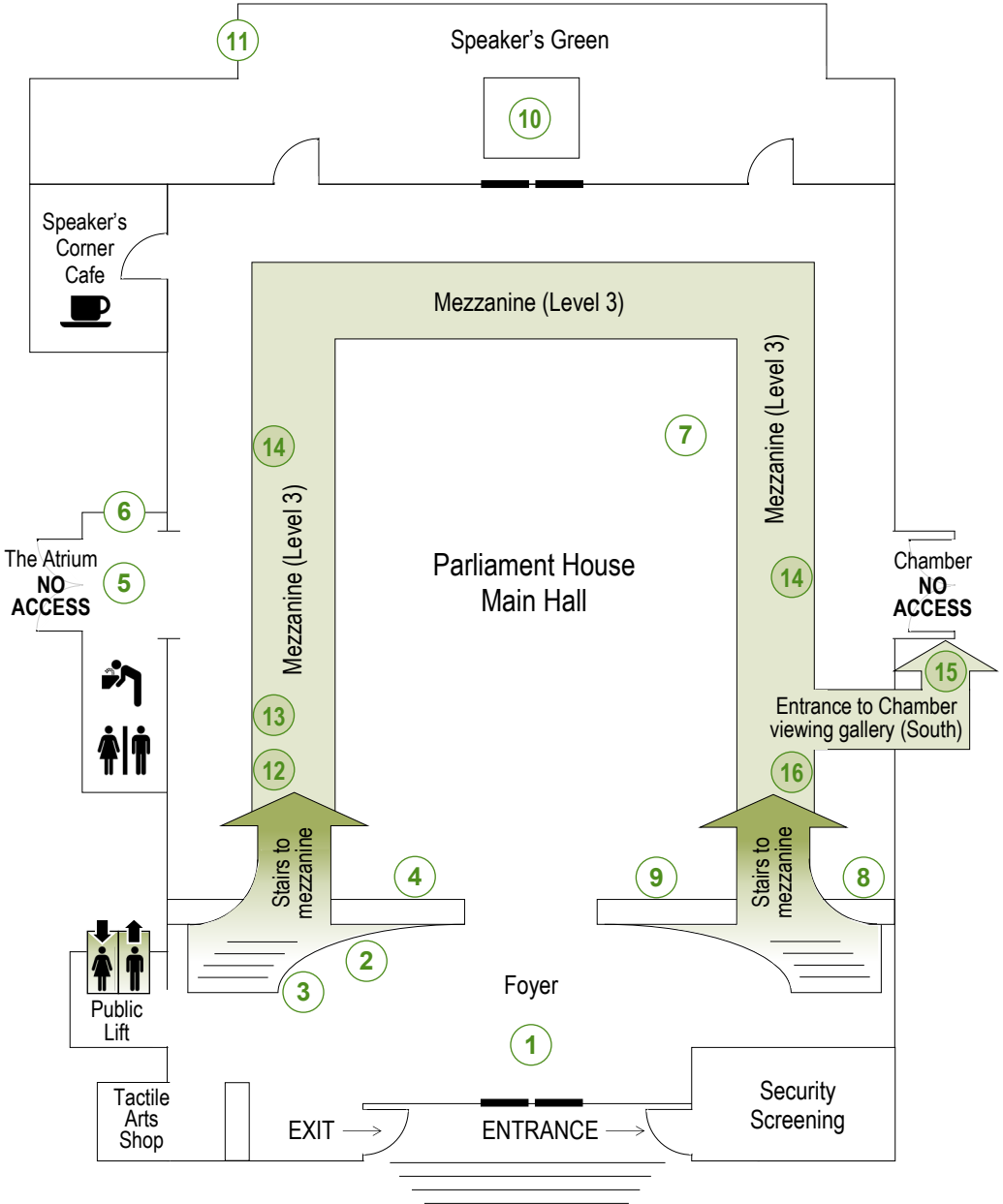
Self Guided Tour Booklet



Mitchell Street, Darwin
Northern Territory
Department of the Legislative Assembly



Self-Guided Tour



***Parliament House is located on the ancestral lands of the Larrakia people.
We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.***

Parliament House in Darwin was officially opened by Governor-General Bill Hayden on 18 August 1994. Designed by Meldrum Burrows and MLE Architects JV [Joint Venture], it forms part of State Square, which includes the Supreme Court, landscaped areas, and car parking, with a total development cost of approximately \$170 million.

The building accommodates the Legislative Assembly Chamber, offices for members, ministers, and opposition, as well as Parliamentary Counsel, media facilities, a café, and a craft shop. The Chamber currently seats 25 members, with provision for future expansion.

The building measures 90 by 50 metres, covering 23,000m² over five levels. It is designed for the tropical climate, featuring a parasol roof and façade that block about 80% of direct sunlight, shaded verandahs, and cyclone-resistant features.

The public is welcome, with areas available for private hire. The Main Hall and Speaker's Green host public events, a glass gallery allows school groups to observe Parliament and two open galleries allow the public to observe also.

Australian materials are used throughout, including brown granite from Mt Bundy, black granite from South Australia, and Tasmanian Sassafras and Brushbox timber. The building is intended to serve the Northern Territory for at least 100 years.

FOYER

1. Sturt's Desert Rose Mosaic



The floor features a stylised mosaic of the Sturt's Desert Rose, the Northern Territory's floral emblem, designed by local artist Geoff Todd. Made from stone and metal, it represents the land, law, and people. The seven petals symbolise the six states and the Northern Territory. Parliament is shown as the radiating arms between the petals and a circle of stainless steel, while the people of the NT are represented by curved bronze lines within the steel circle.

2. NT Flag

The NT flag, designed by Dr Robert Ingpen AM, was first raised on 1 July 1978 to mark the granting of Self-Government. It features the Territory's official colours—ochre, black, and white—and includes the floral emblem, the Sturt's Desert Rose.

3. Harry Chan Bust

Dr Harry Chan OBE was the first elected President of the Northern Territory Legislative Council serving from December 1965 to August 1969. The Legislative Council operated from 1947 to 1974 and included both Commonwealth-appointed and elected members.

4. Remonstrance

- ◇ The 1996 Remonstrance (first display on wall), submitted by the NT Legislative Assembly, opposed the Commonwealth's plan to override the NT's Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995.
- ◇ The 1962 Remonstrance (second display on wall), expressing the NT Legislative Council's grievances, was presented to the Senate and returned on permanent loan in 1988 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Council's establishment.
- ◇ The 2018 Remonstrance (displayed on the pylon) urged the Australian Parliament to repeal section 50A of the Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978, to restore the NT Parliament's ability to legislate on euthanasia.

5. Time Capsule (The Atrium foyer floor)

The time capsule was installed in 1992 and will be opened in 2048 to mark the 100th anniversary of the first sitting of the NT Legislative Council.



6. Post Office Wall & Shrapnel (The Atrium foyer)

This commemorative wall is constructed from undamaged coalstone remnants of the Darwin Post Office, which was destroyed during the bombing raids on 19 February 1942. A piece of bomb shrapnel recovered from the site was donated by Joe Fisher, a former member of the NT Legislative Council.

7. Bombing of Darwin Plaque

Near the entrance to the Office of the Speaker, a plaque embedded in the floor marks the approximate site where a bomb struck the Post Office during the first attack on Darwin on 19 February 1942. Nearby pillars display interpretive panels about the Bombing of Darwin.

8. Tattered Flag

This was found at the intersection of Smith and Bennett Streets on the afternoon of 19th February 1942 and was donated by Cpl. Hill R.W.J., 'R' Coy - 43rd Battalion.

9. Member Portraits

Portraits of our current Members of the Legislative Assembly can be found here.

10. Memorial Fountain

The fountain's central feature is a granite Sturt's Desert Rose emblem. It is dedicated to Peter Malmstedt and Andrew Snow, who died in a crane collapse during the building's construction phase in March 1991.



11. Previous Assembly Plaques

The wall surrounding the Speaker's Green features a plaque for each Assembly since the first in 1974, listing the names of all members from each term.

12. Ngarra Law painting

Ngarra is the Aboriginal customary law of Arnhem Land. This painting, by James Gaykamangu, is based on the honey bee ceremony which teaches Yolngu people how to live within the law.

13. Coat of Arms

The Northern Territory Coat of Arms symbolizes the people, history, and landscapes of the NT. It features the floral emblem, Sturt's Desert Rose, and the faunal emblems, the Red Kangaroo and Wedge-tailed Eagle. At its centre is a shield adorned with Aboriginal motifs. A female figure represents a Mimi spirit from Arnhem Land, flanked by designs inspired by Central Australian Aboriginal art, symbolising campsites connected by paths. The kangaroos hold shells native to the coastline—the Chiragra Spider Conch and True Heart Cockle—while the eagle grasps a Tjurunga Stone, a sacred object of Central Australian Aboriginal people. The plumed helmet denotes the NT's wartime history.

14. Portrait Gallery

These are portraits of former Chief Ministers and Speakers of the NT. Each portrait is created by an artist of the Chief Minister's or Speaker's choosing.

15. The Parliamentary Chamber (viewed from the gallery)

The Northern Territory has a unicameral (meaning single house) parliament, serving as the equivalent of a lower house in a bicameral system. Green, the traditional colour of lower houses in the Westminster system, is used throughout the Chamber and furnishings. The building includes three public galleries, one of which is enclosed for educational sessions. The Media Gallery is located above the Speaker's Chair.

Dispatch Boxes (on the table)

The two dispatch boxes, made of oak and ebony, were gifted by the Commonwealth Parliament. They replicate the boxes used in the House of Representatives, which in turn are modeled on those of the British House of Commons. Although no longer used in modern parliaments, dispatch boxes once carried papers between the British Parliament and the Monarch.



Mace (viewed Sitting days only)

The Mace was presented by the Commonwealth Parliament in 1979. Crafted by Garrards, Royal Jewellers to Queen Elizabeth II, it is made of silver and gold gilt. The Mace incorporates symbols reflecting the Westminster tradition, including the St George's Cross above the Crown. The orb features the NT Coat of Arms and the Queen's cypher (EIIIR), with stylised Wedge-tailed Eagles beneath. The NT floral emblem, Sturt's Desert Rose, is intertwined with the Tudor Rose, and a Spider Conch Shell is depicted at the base.



16. Yirrkala Bark Painting

This painting was created by Narritjin Maymuru, an artist, community leader and proponent of the historic 1963 Yirrkala Bark petition.

Witness to History

For at least 50,000 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived on these lands and practiced traditional cultures and languages.

- 1863** The Northern Territory (NT) was annexed from New South Wales to become part of South Australia.
- 1869** South Australian surveyor-general George Goyder surveyed the land for a new town of Palmerston, later called Darwin. His plan included a government area near Mitchell Street and the Esplanade.
- 1871** Australia was connected to the world through an undersea telegraph cable from Java, Indonesia, to Darwin, which linked to Britain. This cable connected with the Overland Telegraph Line to South Australia. A stone cairn in Liberty Square (left of Parliament House) marks the cable's landing site. The first message to London was sent in late 1871, and the overland line was completed in 1872. In 1873, the original Palmerston Post and Telegraphic Office was built and served as the junction between the undersea cable and the Overland Telegraph. Located where Parliament House now stands, it housed workshops and accommodation for postal and telegraph staff.
- 1911** On January 1, the NT was handed over to the Commonwealth and placed under the control of an Administrator - Dr. John Gilruth.
- 1922** The NT was allowed to elect one member for the House of Representatives in Canberra, but without voting rights.
- 1936** The NT's House of Representatives member in Canberra was given voting rights but could only vote on laws (called ordinances) that affected the NT.
- 1942** On 19 February, the post office was destroyed by bombs during the first attack on Darwin in World War II, killing 10 people. The post office was later moved to a new location.
- 1947** A new NT Legislative Council with 13 members was created, including 6 elected members and 7 official nominees chosen by the Commonwealth, with power to make ordinances 'for the peace, order and good government of the Territory'. The topic of these ordinances was subject to several caveats and their approval was at the discretion of the Canberra-appointed Administrator.
- 1955** The old post office site was rebuilt to house the NT Legislative Council.
- 1958** The NT's member in Canberra was granted permission to vote on all NT related laws. The 6 elected NT Legislative Council members resigned in protest over delays in reforming the Council. The next year, the Council grew to 17 members: 8 elected members, 6 official and 3 unofficial Commonwealth nominees. The Administrator was appointed President.
- 1962** The Legislative Council sent a formal complaint (called a remonstrance) to the Commonwealth about having little control over local matters.
- 1965** The Administrator of the Legislative Council and was replaced by an elected President.
- 1968** The NT's member in Canberra was granted the same voting rights as other Commonwealth Parliament members. The NT Legislative Council's unofficial Commonwealth nominees were also replaced by a further 3 elected members.

- 1974** The first fully elected Legislative Assembly with 19 members met in November. On 25th December, Cyclone Tracy badly damaged the building, but the Assembly still met 8 days later despite the exposed electrical wires and holes in the roof.
- 1975** The NT was granted 2 members in the Commonwealth Senate.
- 1976** The federal government's *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act* established Australia's first Indigenous freehold land tenure system, granting Traditional Owner's title to about 50% of NT land and, after the 2008 Blue Mud Bay decision, approximately 85% of NT coastline.
- 1978** The NT was given self-government by the Commonwealth Parliament with the *NT (Self-Government) Act 1978*.
- 1982** The number of NT Assembly members was increased to 25 to match the NT's growth.
- 1988** A deal made between the Commonwealth and NT (called a Memorandum of Understanding) meant the NT would be funded like the states. The NT Government then announced plans for a State Square with a new Parliament House and Supreme Court.
- 1990** The NT Legislative Assembly moved across the road to the Chan Building (since demolished) while the new Parliament House was being built. The foundation stone was laid on 2 August by the Honourable Nicholas Dondas AM, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.
- 1992** The High Court's Mabo decision established Native Title in common law, recognising Indigenous Australians as the Traditional Owners of the land prior to British colonisation in 1770, and affirming that this title should be acknowledged where it has not been removed.
- 1994** Parliament House was officially opened by the Governor-General, the Honourable Bill Hayden AC, on 18 August.
- 1996** The NT Legislative Assembly sent a formal complaint (remonstrance) to the Commonwealth about their *Euthanasia Laws Bill 1996*. This law, passed in 1997, changed the *NT Self-Government Act 1978* and served to cancel the NT's *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* from 1995.
- 1998** A referendum was held in the NT to decide if it should become a state. It was rejected by 51% voting 'no'.
- 2001** As the population grew, the NT's one Commonwealth House of Representatives seat, Lingiari, was split into two. The new seat, Solomon, covers the Darwin area.
- 2004** The Statehood Steering Committee was set up with support from both NT major parties. It ran Statehood community consultations and awareness campaigns, which led to establishing the NT Constitutional Convention Committee in 2011 and passage of the *Constitutional Convention (Elections) Act 2011*.
- 2018** A complaint (remonstrance) was sent to the Commonwealth asking them not to treat Australian citizens differently based on where they live. It also asked the House of Representatives to repeal the section of the *NT (Self-Government) Act 1978* which restricted laws on voluntary assisted dying.
- 2020** The Commonwealth *Electoral Amendment (Territory Representation) Bill 2020* was passed to make sure Territory representation is more equal to that of the states in the future.
- 2021** The Commonwealth removed section 50A of the *NT (Self-Government) Act 1978*, allowing the NT to make its own laws on voluntary assisted dying again.



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