



Parliament in the Northern Territory

Information booklet for secondary students



What is Parliament?

Definition: a group of people representing the Northern Territory who have been given the authority to make laws.

The modern Australian parliamentary system is a variation of the Westminster system which originated in Britain. The British Parliamentary system has a very long history. By 1215 when King John signed the Magna Carta he agreed to the establishment of a Great Council which would be responsible to the State, not the Monarch.

Features of a modern Westminster system Parliament include:

- Law is made by the parliament – not by the Monarch
- The independence of the Speaker
- An **executive** – Prime Minister and Cabinet (those responsible for government departments)
- An **opposition**
- An official record published of parliamentary debates (**Hansard**)
- Political parties
- Set procedures

In Australia, our parliaments emerged as each colony established in the 1800s. When Australia federated on January 1, 1901 a Parliament for the nation was established. We refer to it as our **Federal Parliament**. Colonial parliaments became State Parliament and continue to make laws for their state.

Three Levels of Government

We have three levels of Government in Australia, each has different power and responsibilities although sometimes these overlap.

FEDERAL	TERRITORY/STATE	LOCAL
The Federal Parliament gets its power from the Australian Constitution	The Northern Territory Parliament gets its power from the Self Government Act 1978 (Commonwealth)	Law making powers for shire councils and city councils comes from a law passed at State or Territory level called the Local Government Act
One parliament only	Eight parliaments	Seventeen local Council areas in the Northern Territory Over 560 local councils across Australia
Makes laws to govern all Australians eg. immigration	Makes laws just for people in that state or territory eg. driving	Makes by-laws and regulations for people within their boundaries eg. rubbish collection and recycling

Parliament in the Northern Territory

- The official name for the Parliament of the Northern Territory is the Legislative Assembly
- The term Legislative Assembly refers to a group of people who propose laws

Fast Facts

Fact	What it means
Legislative Assembly is unicameral	A parliament with one chamber
Duration of the Legislative Assembly is four years	How long each Assembly is elected for
Speaker is an elected member	Has the responsibility to maintain order in the Chamber according to the rules (Standing Orders)
All members are elected	Members represent an electorate – an area with approximately 6,000 voters

The Northern Territory Legislative Assembly



Voting, elections and political parties

- The Parliament of the Northern Territory has 25 **electorates**; each electorate has about 6,000 voters
- Members are elected for a fixed four-year term. Elections are held on the fourth Saturday in August every four years. (Saturday 26 August 2028)
- Any member of the community who is 18 years old, an Australian citizen and on the electoral roll can try to become a Member of Parliament. You can join a political party and then be chosen by the party to be a candidate for a specific electorate at the next election. You can also choose to stand as an independent – this means that you are not connected to any political party.
- Ahead of an election candidates will have their platform – this tells potential electors what you as a candidate stand for on a range of issues
- Generally, when you stand as a political party candidate you will follow the policies of the political party you represent
- Standing as an independent means that you will develop your own policies on the issues that are of importance to the people in the electorate
- Currently in the Northern Territory there are five registered political parties, only two have members represented in the parliament
 - Animal Justice Party
 - Australian Labor Party – Northern Territory Branch
 - Country Liberal Party of the Northern Territory
 - Federation Party Northern Territory
 - NT Greens
- To be elected to the Legislative Assembly you must have been the most preferred candidate on the ballot paper once all votes have been counted by the Northern Territory Electoral Commission





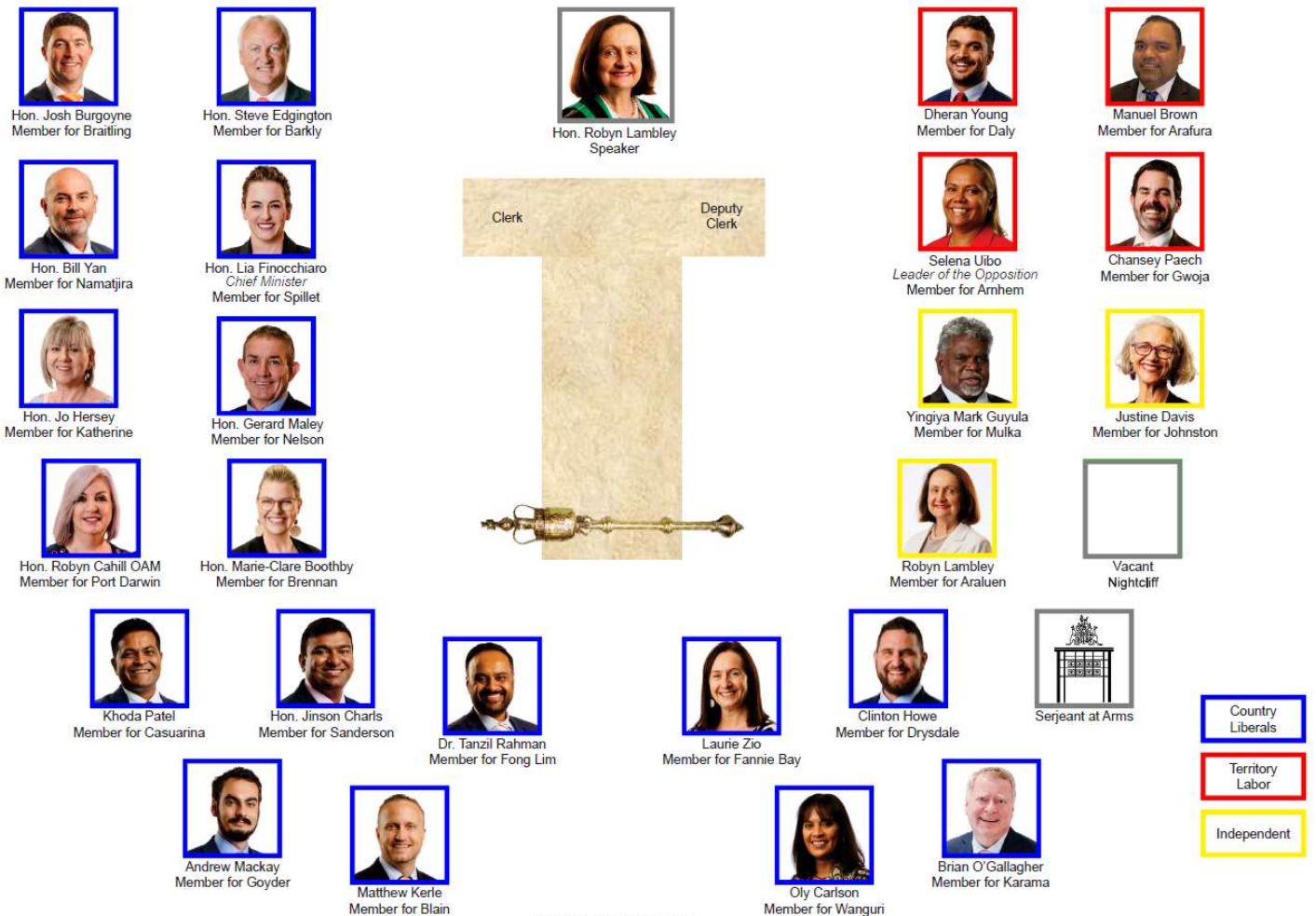
The role of a member of parliament



- Are our elected representatives in Parliament
- Bring a variety of experience to their role
- Work to achieve results for their **constituents** both within their electorate and in the Parliament
- Keep a close connection with their electorate by using social media, websites, newsletters and meetings to keep in touch
- Members are often approached by their constituents to assist them on issues they may have with government departments
- Attend and participate in parliamentary sitting days
- Members who are not ministers may be allocated positions on parliamentary committees
- Committees investigate in detail bills before the parliament, they make recommendations that may have an impact on the final law passed

The 15th Assembly

Chamber Seating



Current as at 9 February 2026

Participation in democracy



Citizens, political parties, elected representatives, pressure groups, unions, church groups, special interest groups and individuals use a variety of ways to participate in the working of the Parliament to get their point of view across to our law makers. Different strategies are used by different groups to **lobby** and put pressure on decision makers.



Delegation meeting with the Prime Minister



Parliamentary committee hearing



Do some research on the different ways the community influence members of Parliament. What are the pros and cons? Make sure to find an example.

Method	Pros	Cons	Example when this has occurred
Public demonstration			
Social media			
Parliamentary committee hearing			
Meeting with members of Parliament			1967 Constitutional Referendum
Petition			
Opinion polling			

Making a Law in the Northern Territory

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

1st READING

The bill (an idea for a new law) is introduced in to the Legislative Assembly.

2nd READING

Members debate and vote on the main idea of the bill.

Consideration in detail

Members look closely at the bill, and may make changes.

3rd READING

Members vote on the final version of the bill.

BILL PASSED

in the
Legislative Assembly

ADMINISTRATOR

Assent

The Northern Territory
Administrator signs the bill.

**BILL BECOMES A LAW
FOR THE
NORTHERN TERRITORY**

A - Z of Parliament

Amendment	An alteration (to a bill, an act, a constitution, etc.)
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
Constituents	The electoral area and voters whom a member of parliament represents
Debate	A formal discussion on a bill or other topic in which all views of the parliament can be put
Election	The choosing of a person or government representatives by voting
First speech	(Formerly known as maiden speech) when a newly elected member makes their first speech in the chamber. Traditionally there are no interjections
Government	The political party with the majority of the elected members in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly
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
Interjection	A remark made in the parliamentary chamber that interrupts a speech or debate
Judicial power	The power courts have to interpret the laws made by Parliament
Lobby	A group of people trying to get support for a particular cause; to approach people for support; or an entrance hall or corridor
Motion	An idea or proposal put forward at a meeting for consideration, debate and decision
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
Point of order	When a member challenges that a standing order has been broken – the speaker must then rule if the order has been broken or not
Question time	A period of time each day in parliament where ministers are asked questions concerning their responsibilities by other members
Responsible government	A system of government answerable to elected representatives of the people for its actions
Standing orders	The permanent rules which govern the conduct of business in a house of parliament
Table	When a member presents a document to the Legislative Assembly to be included as an official record of the Parliament
Unicameral	A parliament that has one chamber
Vote	A formal expression of a choice, such as putting one's hand up or marking a ballot paper
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)