

AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT – KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS



Act Of Parliament	a law made by Parliament; a bill, which has passed all three readings in each house and has received the royal assent
Backbencher	members of Parliament who are not ministers, shadow ministers or officers
Bill	a proposal for a new law being presented to Parliament
By-election	a special election held to fill the seat of a Member of the House of Representatives who has died or resigned
Cabinet	the group of senior ministers in a government
Cabinet government	a system of government in which the most important decisions are made by cabinet ministers, who are members of Parliament and who are supported by a majority in the lower house
Caucus meeting	the meeting of the parliamentary members of a political party
Coalition	the joining together of two or more groups or parties, usually to form a government or opposition
Commonwealth	the people of a nation or state a group of countries or peoples united by a common interest
Constitution	the set of basic rules by which a country or state is governed – such the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act
Cross the floor	to vote with a party other than that for which a Member was elected
Democracy	a way of governing a country in which the people elect representatives to form a government on their behalf – in a country with such a government the idea that everyone has equal rights
Donkey vote	a vote where a voter appears to make no choice among the candidates in an election, often numbering preferences for candidates in the order in which they are listed on the ballot-paper
Federation	the forming of a nation by the union of a number of states, each of which retains some power to govern itself, while ceding some powers to a national government. Australia's Federation was created in 1901 by the joining together of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania
Frontbencher	those members of Parliament who are ministers or shadow ministers the seats where such members sit
Governor-General	the representative of the Queen in Australia at Federal level
Hansard	official written recording of all spoken and debated in Parliament
House of Representatives	one of the two houses of the federal Parliament of Australia, whose Members are elected on a population basis
Leader of the Opposition	the leader of the party or coalition of parties which is the next largest after the government party in the House of Representatives
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate	the leader of the party which is the next largest after the government party in the Senate, and which is made up of Senators who do not support the government
Legislative Assembly	the Lower House of Parliament in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia and the sole house of Parliament in Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory
Lower House	the House of Representatives is the lower house in the Australian Federal Parliament (which is a two-chamber Parliament)
House of Assembly	the lower house of Parliament in South Australia and Tasmania
Mace	once a weapon of war shaped like a club, and the symbol of royal authority, but now the symbol of authority of the Lower House of Parliament

Member of Parliament	a member of a house of Parliament, usually used to describe a member of a lower house and, in Australia, referring to Members of the House of Representatives, who may use the initials M.P. after their names
Minister	a Member of Parliament who is a member of the executive government, and who is usually in charge of a government department
Oath	a declaration of loyalty to the Queen which the Constitution requires each Member of Parliament to make before taking a seat in Parliament
Ombudsman	an official whose job is to look into peoples complaints against the government or public servants
Opposition	the second largest political party or coalition of parties after the government party in the House of Representatives which works to oppose what it believes to be wrong in government policies or actions, and which stands ready to form a government should the voters so decide at the next or a subsequent election
Parliament	(in Australia) an assembly of elected representatives with an Upper and a Lower House which with the Head of State (the Queen, represented by the Governor-General or Governor) makes the laws for the country or state
Petition	a document presented to a house of Parliament by a person or group of people asking for action on a matter
Political party	an organisation that exists to achieve particular public policy objectives by having members elected to Parliament
Portfolio	the area of responsibility or duties of a minister in a government
Preferential voting	a system of voting in which a voter shows an order of preference for candidates; if no candidate receives more than half of first preference votes (or in the case of voting for the Senate, candidates have not achieved a pre-determined quota), the next preferences of voters for the least successful candidates are distributed until candidate or candidates are elected
Press gallery	the area in each chamber set aside for seating for members of the press reporting on Parliament from Parliament House
Prime Minister	the head of the national government, the chief minister in some countries, including Australia
Question Time	a daily period of time in each house of the Parliament where other members ask ministers questions concerning their responsibilities
Referendum	a vote by all voters on a question concerning the nation
Senate	one of the two houses of the federal Parliament of Australia, which has 76 Senators, 12 from each of the six states and two each from the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, elected from each state and territory voting as one electorate
Senator	a member of the Australian Senate
Shadow cabinet	the group of members of the main opposition party or parties in a Parliament who act as party spokespersons on the principal areas of government; the senior members of the shadow ministry
Shadow minister	a member of the main opposition party in a Parliament who is a party spokesperson usually in an area matching the responsibility of a minister
Speaker (of the House of Representatives)	the elected Member of the House of Representatives to be its presiding officer
Royal Commission	a body formed by a person or group chosen by a government to inquire into and report on a matter of public concern
Upper House	the Senate is the upper house in the Australian Federal Parliament (a two-chamber Parliament)
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 directly responsible to the Parliament

Source: Australian Parliament House website - Glossary
<http://www.aph.gov.au/find/glossary.htm#act>