



**Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Victoria**

Fact Sheet 4

Parliamentary Terminology

The Parliamentary Calendar

Session of Parliament

A session is a period of Parliament that starts on the first sitting day following a general election or prorogation and ends when the Legislative Assembly expires or is prorogued or dissolved.

Sitting of Parliament

A sitting refers to the period or periods each year when Parliament 'sits' or is meeting. Current practice is for a sitting period to last for the whole year. Previously there were two distinct periods each year — the Autumn and Spring sittings. When the Parliament is not sitting it is 'in recess'. During sitting weeks the Legislative Assembly normally sits on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, although it can sit on a Friday too.

Proclamations

An official announcement by the Governor; usually concerning the date for an Act to come into operation, the beginning or end of a parliament, or appointments of ministers. All proclamations are published in the Victorian Government Gazette. See www.gazette.vic.gov.au/.

Expiration

The Parliament of Victoria has fixed four year terms. That means that every four years the Assembly 'expires' and a general election is held. The election is held on the last Saturday in November and the Assembly expires on the Tuesday 25 days before then.

The expiration of the Assembly has the following effects:

- All proceedings come to an end — that is all bills, motions and questions on notice that have not been dealt with lapse.
- Any sessional orders cease to have effect.
- All committees cease to exist.

Prorogation

The process where the Governor issues a proclamation ending the current session of the Parliament. This also has the effect of terminating all business before the House, ie any outstanding business on the notice paper automatically lapses. If the Assembly is prorogued there is not a general election, a new session of Parliament simply begins.

Dissolution

The Legislative Assembly is dissolved through a proclamation issued by the Governor. This results in a general election being held and the end of the Parliament. The Assembly can be dissolved for either of two reasons: If the Assembly passes a motion of no confidence in the Premier and other ministers, or on the advice of the Premier in the case of a deadlocked bill.

Debates

Address-in-Reply

When a new session is opened, the Governor makes a speech outlining the Government's plans. Both the Assembly and the Council separately respond to the speech, that response is known as the Address-in-Reply. Debate on the Address-in-Reply usually takes place over a number of days and is then presented to the Governor.

Further information:

- *Fact Sheet 5: Opportunities for Debate*
- *Fact Sheet 26: Opening of Parliament*

Inaugural Speech

An inaugural speech (traditionally known as a 'maiden speech') is the first speech a new member of Parliament makes to the House. It is normally heard without interruption and is non-political, providing some information about the member's background and areas of interest. It is usually a contribution to the Address-in-Reply.

Further information:

- *Fact Sheet 5: Opportunities for Debate*

Parliament House and the Legislative Assembly

Chamber

The Assembly and Council each have their own Chamber where they meet to conduct parliamentary business and debate. There are public galleries where people may view proceedings, but only members of that House and authorised parliamentary officers may enter the debating area.

Further information:

- View the Virtual Tour under The Parliament Building section of the Parliament Website
- *Fact Sheet 14: Why is the Assembly Green?*

House

There are two Houses of Parliament, the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council and the term is often used interchangeably with 'Chamber'. It is also used to mean the Parliament in session, for example 'the House agreed to the motion' or 'the House considered the amendments'.

Further information:

- *Fact Sheet 12: Victoria's Parliamentary History*

Parliamentary Procedures

Tabling of Documents

To ensure that information is available to both members of Parliament and the public, documents such as government reports, petitions and planning scheme amendment summaries have to be presented (or 'tabled') in Parliament.

Further information:

- *Fact Sheet 18: Documents Tabled in the Legislative Assembly*

Division

When the debate on an item has concluded, a vote is taken. This may be without a count (known as 'on the voices') or, if demanded by more than one member, by a division. If a division is called, the bells are rung to summon members to the Chamber.

Traditionally, members have moved to opposite sides of the Chamber to vote for or against a question. Under current procedures, however, party votes are normally held. The independent members are each asked for their vote, and

then the whip of each party states the total vote on behalf of all their party members present. The votes are then tallied by the Clerk and the result announced. The members voting for and against the question are recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

Further information:

- *Fact Sheet 32: Divisions*
- *Fact Sheet 35: Votes and Proceedings*

Standing Orders

Standing orders are the comprehensive, permanent set of rules that regulate procedure (such as the stages through which bills proceed), debate and the conduct of members.

Further Information:

- View Standing Orders under the Legislative Assembly section of the Parliament Website

Sessional Orders

Sessional orders are the temporary rules governing the conduct of business in the Assembly and apply only for the session in which they were adopted. They may vary the operation of the standing orders.

Further information:

- View Sessional Orders under the Legislative Assembly section of the Parliament Website

May's Parliamentary Practice

Also known as *Erskine May*, it is the procedural reference text produced by the House of Commons, first written over 150 years ago. *May* is used as a procedural guide by parliaments following the Westminster system. If a procedure is not covered by standing orders, the Assembly looks to the rules and practice of other Westminster parliaments.

Legislation

Second Reading of a Bill

The stage in Parliament's consideration of a bill, when a minister proposes that 'a bill be read a second time' and then makes a speech outlining its

purpose and effect. The bill is made public at this stage. When the bill is next considered, a wide-ranging debate takes place.

Further information:

- *Fact Sheet 2: Stages of a Bill*
- Information Sheet *How a Law is Made in Victoria*

Consideration in Detail

This is an optional stage in the Assembly's consideration of a bill. The bill is examined clause by clause and amendments may be moved. It is usually chaired by the Deputy Speaker.

Further information:

- *Fact Sheet 17: Amendments to Bills — A Practical Guide*
- Information Sheet *How a Law is Made in Victoria*

Royal Assent

When a bill is given royal assent it becomes an Act. This occurs when the Governor, on behalf of the Queen, approves a bill which has been passed by both Houses. The Act does not necessarily come into operation on the day of royal assent.

Further information:

- *Fact Sheet 2: Stages of a Bill*
- Information Sheet *How a Law is Made in Victoria*

Official Records

Votes and Proceedings

The *Votes and Proceedings* are the official minutes of the Legislative Assembly. Unlike *Hansard*, which is an almost verbatim account of debates, the *Votes* are a summary of all the House's formal actions and decisions.

Further information:

- View *Votes and Proceedings* under the Legislative Assembly, Chamber Documents section of the Parliament Website
- *Fact Sheet 35: Votes and Proceedings*

Notice Paper

Each House produces its own notice paper which is an agenda for the day's proceedings. It shows items for discussion including bills and motions.

Further information:

- View notice papers under the Legislative Assembly, Chamber Documents section of the Parliament Website

Hansard

Hansard is the official printed reports of the debates and proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council.

Further information:

- ‘About *Hansard*’ under the *Hansard* section of the Parliament Website

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Fact Sheets

The Legislative Assembly Procedure Office has produced a series of Fact Sheets that explain parliamentary procedure and terminology. All Fact Sheets are available on Parliament’s website www.parliament.vic.gov.au or through the Procedure Office.

Contact Details

Procedure Office, Legislative Assembly, Parliament House, Spring Street, East Melbourne, Vic 3002

Phone No: 03 9651 8563 Fax No: 03 9650 7245 Email: assembly@parliament.vic.gov.au