



**Legislative Assembly  
Parliament of Victoria**

## **Fact Sheet 23**

### **The Speaker**

#### **Background**

The Legislative Assembly is made up of 88 members of Parliament, one of whom presides and holds the title of Speaker.

The Speaker is the principal office holder in the Legislative Assembly (the equivalent position in the Legislative Council is called the President), having been elected to the position by the other members of the House either at the start of a new parliament, after an election, or following the retirement or death of the previous Speaker.

The Speaker broadly has four roles:

- As an elected member representing a Victorian electorate
- As Chair of meetings of the Legislative Assembly
- As the Legislative Assembly's representative at State and other official occasions
- As administrative head of the Legislative Assembly and, jointly with the President, the Department of Parliamentary Services.

#### **History**

The position of Speaker is one with long associations in the history of Westminster parliaments, having continuously existed since the thirteenth century. Since that time the position has evolved from being one of an agent of the monarch and politically associated with the government of the day, to the current position which sees the Speaker as being above party issues.

Consequently the Speaker does not normally participate in voting or debating procedures within the House, although the Speaker still maintains the rights and privileges that all other members have. Closely linked to this is the concept of impartiality whereby the Speaker is above party political matters, is neutral on public matters and shows no fear or favour to any members, irrespective of their political party affiliation.

The first Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly was elected in 1856 and his portrait, together with the portraits of all subsequent Speakers, is on display in the Speaker's corridor at the front of the Legislative Assembly Chamber at Parliament House.

### **Member of Parliament**

The Speaker is elected from the 88 members of the Legislative Assembly and as such maintains the same electoral responsibilities as the other 87 members, whilst carrying out the additional functions required of the Speaker.

The current Speaker, Jenny Lindell, was elected on 19 December 2006 and is the Legislative Assembly's second female Speaker. She is addressed as 'Speaker' and has been the member for the south eastern metropolitan seat of Carrum since 1999. This electorate includes the areas of Aspendale, Aspendale Gardens, Carrum, Chelsea, Chelsea Heights, Edithvale and Patterson Lakes.

### **Presiding over Debates**

The second area of duties of the Speaker concerns the sittings of the Legislative Assembly. The Speaker ensures that the dignity and decorum of the House is preserved (see *Fact Sheet 7: Decorum in the House*), as well as protecting the rights and privileges of the members. The Speaker maintains order in the Legislative Assembly, putting questions at the conclusion of debate and presiding over debates and proceedings.

The Speaker upholds the standing and sessional orders (rules) of the House, maintains order and makes rulings (referred to as Speakers' rulings) which are called upon from time to time to guide and direct the House. For example, a member who has used offensive language in the House may be directed to withdraw the offensive words. The Speaker has the authority to order members to withdraw from the Chamber should they not comply with the Speaker's directives.

Within the Chamber the Speaker presides over the proceedings from a centrally located raised chair at the head of the Chamber, with the clerks at the table immediately below the chair, the government to the Speaker's right and the opposition to the left.

All debate in the Chamber is addressed to the Speaker (usually referred to as 'the Chair') and it is the Chair's responsibility to allocate 'the call' (which member speaks next) during proceedings.

The Speaker in the Victorian Parliament traditionally wore a wig and gown, in the style of the Windsor Court, whilst performing duties in the Chamber or at official ceremonial events. This ceremonial dress has not, however, been worn since 1999.

In order to assist the Speaker in the sittings of the House a Deputy Speaker is appointed at the start of a new parliament. The Deputy Speaker chairs the consideration in detail stage of debate, during which clauses of bills are examined in detail and amendments are considered. The Speaker also appoints a number of members to act as Acting Speakers. The Acting Speakers assist the Speaker and Deputy Speaker by chairing some of the debates.

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There are rules which govern when the Speaker may either speak in a debate or vote. The Speaker:

- cannot take part in any debates.
- does not vote in the House unless, after a division, the votes for and against a question are equal. When this happens the Speaker must give a casting vote and will normally, when voting, give reasons for his or her choice of vote, see *Fact Sheet 24: Casting Votes*.

### **The Legislative Assembly's Representative**

The Speaker is the representative of the House, conveying messages and addresses from the Legislative Assembly to the Legislative Council and the Governor. Additionally the Speaker represents the Legislative Assembly at official functions and regularly entertains at Parliament House distinguished Australian and overseas visitors.

### **Administrative Duties**

The Speaker has administrative responsibilities in relation to the Legislative Assembly as well as the Department of Parliamentary Services, which provides support services and resources to members, their electoral staff and the House departments.

Within the Legislative Assembly the Speaker's role approximates the relationship that a minister has with his or her department. The Speaker is the principal office holder of the Department of the Legislative Assembly with over 50 members of staff working within the Department. On a day-to-day basis the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly manages the functions of the department. However all major policy decisions and developments are overseen by the Speaker.

The Speaker, along with the President of the Legislative Council, is effectively the custodian of Parliament House, having control over its jurisdiction and the accommodation and services of the Legislative Assembly.

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**List of Former Speakers**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Period of Office</b>
The Hon Sir Francis Murphy	1856–1871
The Hon Sir Charles MacMahon	1871–1877
The Hon Sir Charles Gavan Duffy	1877–1880
The Hon Sir Charles MacMahon	1880
The Hon Peter Lalor	1880–1887
The Hon Sir Matthew Henry Davies	1887–1892
The Hon Sir Thomas Bent	1892–1894
The Hon Sir Graham Berry	1894–1897
The Hon Francis Conway Mason	1897–1902
The Hon Duncan Gillies	1902–1903
The Hon William David Beazley	1903–1904
The Hon Sir Frank Madden	1904–1917
The Hon Sir John Emanuel Mackey	1917–1924
The Hon Sir John Bowser	1924–1927
The Hon Oswald Robinson Snowball	1927–1928
The Hon Sir Alexander James Peacock	1928–1933
The Hon Maurice Blackburn	1933–1934
The Hon William Hugh Everard	1934–1937
The Hon Thomas Tunnecliffe	1937–1940
The Hon William Slater	1940–1942
The Hon Brigadier Sir George Hodges Knox	1942–1947
The Hon Sir Thomas Karran Maltby	1947–1950
The Hon Sir Archie Michaelis	1950–1952
The Hon Patrick Keith Sutton	1952–1955
The Hon Sir William John Farquhar McDonald	1955–1967
The Hon Sir Vernon Howard Colville Christie	1967–1973
The Hon Sir Kenneth Henry Wheeler	1973–1979
The Hon Sidney James Plowman	1979–1982
The Hon Cyril Thomas Edmunds	1982–1988
The Hon Dr Kenneth Alistair Coghill	1988–1992
The Hon John Edward Delzoppo	1992–1996
The Hon Sidney James Plowman	1996–1999
The Hon Alex Andrianopoulos	1999–2003
The Hon Judy Maddigan	2003–2006

Biographical details of all former Speakers can be found on Parliament's website at [www.parliament.vic.gov.au](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au). Select Legislative Assmebly → The Speaker → Former Speakers.

**Further Reading**

Laundy, Philip, *The Office of the Speaker in the Parliaments of the Commonwealth*,

Quiller Press Limited, London, 1984.

*Erskine May*, 23rd edition, Butterworths, London, 2004, pp 218–229.

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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](http://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](mailto:assembly@parliament.vic.gov.au)