



**Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Victoria**

Fact Sheet 5

Opportunities for Debate

Background

Members participate in various debates but seldom have an opportunity to engage in lengthy debate. This fact sheet provides an overview of key opportunities for debate. A general summary of time limits for various debates is included in this fact sheet.

Bills and motions

The rules of debate require a member's contribution to be relevant to the motion or bill before the House. This places limitations on what a member may say. When considering bills, members must confine their comments to matters covered by the bill. The time limits for speaking on bills and motions are contained in Standing Order 131. Time limits vary from a maximum of five minutes to an unlimited amount of time for the member who introduces the bill. The general summary of time limits can be found in the centre of this fact sheet.

Address-in-Reply

The Address-in-Reply is the formal response of the House to the speech made by the Governor at the opening of each session of Parliament. See *Fact Sheet 26: Opening of Parliament*.

Traditionally, a newly elected government member is chosen to move the motion, 'that the Address-in-Reply to the speech of the Governor to both Houses of Parliament, be agreed to by this House'.

The official acknowledgement of the speech reflects the formality of the occasion:

Governor,

We, the Legislative Assembly of Victoria assembled in Parliament, wish to express our loyalty to our Sovereign, and to thank you for the speech which you have made to the Parliament.

A major debate follows, presenting members with one of the few opportunities to engage in unfettered but orderly debate in the House.

This debate covers the full spectrum of government administration and members are generally not concerned by the normal rules of relevancy. Members may speak freely and across a wide range of issues. For a newly elected member making an inaugural speech, the Address-in-Reply is often the first opportunity they have to speak in the House.

Appropriation

An appropriation bill is one which, when passed by the Parliament, will allow the government to spend public money. To appropriate is to put money aside for a particular purpose and this happens reasonably often. In addition to the general appropriation bills, there is also an annual appropriation bill, commonly known as the budget. The debate on this bill is called the appropriation or budget debate.

All appropriation bills must originate in the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Council can amend or, in certain circumstances, suggest amendments to appropriation bills, but cannot amend the annual appropriation bill. The Council has one month to pass the annual appropriation bill. If the bill is not passed by the Council within one month it automatically proceeds to the Governor for royal assent.

The annual appropriation bill, or budget, is usually introduced into the House by the Treasurer in May. It seeks appropriation for the coming financial year. The Treasurer has unlimited speaking time and, at the conclusion of his or her speech, debate is adjourned usually on the motion of the Shadow Treasurer.

When the budget debate is resumed, the Shadow Treasurer normally leads the debate and has unlimited time in which to make a contribution.

The general debate on the appropriation bill may take several weeks. The scope of the debate is almost unlimited reflecting the impact of the budget on all government portfolios.

Grievances

The grievance debate gives members the opportunity to raise matters concerning individual constituents or other issues of concern.

Standing Order 38 provides for the grievance debate to take place on the first Wednesday of a sitting period and every subsequent third sitting Wednesday. On such Wednesdays, the grievance debate starts with the question 'that grievances be noted'. Members then have a time limit of 15 minutes each in which to speak.

This presents another forum for wide-ranging debate in the House and is similar to the adjournment debate that takes place at the end of the day. The whole debate lasts for two hours, or until eight members have spoken, whichever is the shorter.

The grievance debate is thought to derive from an old Westminster practice when open criticism took place prior to the House of Commons agreeing to the budget. It was an opportunity for the Parliament to proclaim its authority over the Crown.

Adjournment Debate

The adjournment debate is an opportunity for members to raise an issue of ‘urgent government administration’. A member may raise an issue on which he or she wishes a specific minister to take some action. The adjournment debate takes place after all other business for that day has been completed.

The time available for members is a total of 30 minutes, or until 10 members have spoken, whichever is the shorter. Each member is restricted to a maximum of three minutes. Ministers can respond during a total period of 30 minutes. For full details about the debate see *Fact Sheet 29: Adjournment of the House*.

Matters of Public Importance

Standing Order 39 provides for discussions on matters of public importance (MPIs). This process is one of the main ways members can initiate discussions on topics of concern.

Each Wednesday morning on a sitting week, other than every third Wednesday morning which is set aside for grievances, the House discusses an MPI. The subject of discussion must be approved by the Speaker before it can be discussed in the House. There are a number of criteria to be met before a topic is deemed to be in order. These criteria are fully explained in *Fact Sheet 10: Matters of Public Importance*.

The choice of subject for discussion alternates between government and non-government members. The MPI lasts a maximum of two hours, with the first government and non-government members speaking for a maximum of 15 minutes and all other members limited to 10 minutes.

Statements by Members

After formal business each day, half an hour is set aside for members to make statements on any matter of concern. Each member may speak for a maximum of 90 seconds. Although this is not an opportunity to participate in a debate on an issue, it does allow members to highlight contemporary events or matters affecting individuals from within or outside their electorates.

Statements on Parliamentary Committee Reports

Under Standing Order 41, time is set aside each Wednesday after the grievance debate or MPI for members to make statements on parliamentary committee reports. Statements can be made on any committee report tabled in the Legislative Assembly during the current Parliament, except *Alert Digest* reports made by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) under section 17 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*.

The time for making statements on parliamentary committee reports is 30 minutes or until six members have spoken, whichever is shorter.

For more information on parliamentary committees, see *Fact Sheet 27: Parliamentary Committees*.

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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.

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