



**Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Victoria**

Fact Sheet 29

Adjournment of the House

Each sitting day ends by the Legislative Assembly (the 'House') adjourning. As part of the adjournment process, a debate takes place known as the 'adjournment debate' which gives members an opportunity to raise matters on a wide range of topics.

Current procedures

The House is usually adjourned after a motion 'That the House now adjourns' is moved by a minister, or proposed by the Speaker. The Speaker also has the power to adjourn the House for lack of a quorum or in the case of grave disorder, though this is very unusual. The most usual manner of adjourning the House is set out in Standing Orders 32 and 33. Business of the House is interrupted each sitting day on the following basis:

- The Speaker automatically interrupts business at 10.00 pm unless a division is taking place. In that situation the interruption is delayed until the division has been completed.
- After business has been interrupted, it is possible for a minister to move a motion to continue the sitting. If that happens and the motion is agreed to, the interrupted business resumes.
- If no motion is moved, the Speaker proposes the question 'That the House now adjourns' and the adjournment debate takes place.
- The business interrupted at 10.00 pm is put down on the next day's notice paper and can be debated again on a future sitting day.

Raising matters in the adjournment debate

This is an opportunity for members to raise issues of concern. The period for raising matters lasts for 30 minutes, or until 10 members have spoken, whichever is the shorter. Within that overall period, a member may speak for a maximum of three minutes.

Over the years a number of rules and customs have developed relating to the adjournment debate:

- Most importantly, this is not an opportunity for members to ask questions. Question time gives members a chance to seek information from ministers. The adjournment debate, however, allows members to give information which they consider requires attention.
- The matter raised must relate to government administration and be something that occurred recently.

- A member must request an action. Asking a minister to continue to do something does not constitute asking him or her to take action nor does asking a minister to refer a matter to a federal minister.
- A member cannot ask for legislation.
- The suggested procedure is for a member to:
 - set out his or her complaint;
 - indicate the minister or department involved;
 - give a brief resumé of the facts;
 - suggest the action sought.
- The Speaker has strongly recommended that members state the action sought as soon as possible in their contributions. This avoids other members taking points of order on admissibility. For example, the action could be outlined early on and then dealt with in more detail later in the three minute period.
- A member should not give a set speech.
- An issue can only be raised once in any one adjournment debate. There is nothing, however, to stop a member raising the same issue on another day.
- Only one subject may be raised by a member.
- Earlier procedures required the issue raised to be of urgent public concern. In more recent years, however, the Chair has taken a relaxed rule to the interpretation of urgency.
- As each member only has three minutes to raise a matter, the Speaker has suggested that points of order of a general nature should be taken at the end of the adjournment debate. This avoids valuable time being lost. In the past the Chair has granted additional time where a frivolous point of order has been made.

Ministers responding to issues raised

After the issues have been raised, ministers present in the House respond. Ministers have discretion to respond as they see fit. The overall maximum time period for all responses is 30 minutes.

Within the overall time limit of 30 minutes, there is no maximum time limit for an individual response. It is possible that the time limit may run out before all responses are given.

Subject to the overall time period, the practice is for ministers to respond to matters raised which come under their jurisdiction. In addition, the minister at the table will respond to all other matters. In doing so, the minister may simply say that he or she will pass the matter on to the minister responsible for a direct response.

Ministers cannot be directed to attend the Chamber. However, the Speaker has ruled that, where a matter is referred to a minister who is not present for a response, that minister has an obligation to respond to the member concerned. The time period for the response is a matter for the minister and not something for the Chair to determine.

Adjournment at the end of the debate

After the period for ministers to respond has ended, the Chair automatically adjourns the House. The House then adjourns to the next sitting day. At the end of a sitting period the House may adjourn until a 'day and hour to be fixed by the Speaker'. The Speaker will write to each member two to three weeks before Parliament resumes to advise of the next sitting day. Current practice is for a sitting period to last for the whole year; in the past there have been separate Autumn and Spring sitting periods.

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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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