



**Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Victoria**

Fact Sheet B3

Matters of Public Importance

In the Legislative Assembly, members discuss issues affecting our day-to-day lives in various ways. Matters of Public Importance (MPIs) are topics members propose for discussion, with the choice alternating between political parties. MPIs cover current issues of public interest. There are rules about how to propose a topic, what can be discussed and getting the Speaker's approval.

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Topics that can be discussed

Members discuss a broad range of topics that includes possible changes to the law.

The issue must be something that comes under the Legislative Assembly's jurisdiction. Topics like defence can only be dealt with by the Commonwealth Parliament in Canberra. The topic must be within a Victorian minister's responsibility.

The topic's wording must be clear and precise. It must not be a wide-ranging issue, as members have limited time to prepare and discuss it.

Under Assembly rules, members cannot attack certain people's character or conduct, unless there is a debate specifically about them. Therefore, an MPI must not include such attacks.

If the Assembly is due to debate the same topic shortly, the Speaker will not allow the MPI. The exception to this rule is the budget. MPIs can cover the same issues as the budget debate.

Similarly, the Speaker will not usually allow an MPI on a topic already discussed during the parliamentary session. However, if there are new, different or justifying circumstances, the Speaker may still approve the MPI.

If a parliamentary committee is investigating the topic, the Speaker will still allow it. However, topics a court is considering are not allowed if they are sub judice. Find out more: *Fact Sheet E3: Sub Judice Convention*.

Speaker's approval of draft MPI

Government and non-government members take turns choosing the MPI topic. Non-government parties share the right according to their relative size.

The party choosing the MPI picks one of its members to lead the discussion. That member gives the draft topic to the Speaker by 4.00 pm on Tuesday, the day before the MPI discussion.

If the Speaker receives more than one topic, he or she chooses one. An MPI will only go ahead if the Speaker decides it is valid. Before agreeing to a topic, the Speaker may ask the member to change the draft to comply with the Legislative Assembly's rules.

When making a decision, the Speaker is not giving a ruling, but acts under the authority given in the Assembly's rules. Therefore, a member cannot challenge the Speaker's decision by moving a motion of dissent.

The Speaker gives a copy of the approved topic to the leaders of each party and any independents, before 5.30 pm on Tuesday.

Procedure in the Chamber

The Chair reads out the topic and asks the proposer to start the discussion. The proposer must be in the Chamber at this point. If they are not present, the MPI cannot go ahead.

The discussion lasts a maximum of two hours. The first government and non-government speakers may each speak for up to 15 minutes. All other members are limited to 10 minutes each.

At the end of most debates, members vote whether to support the motion. An MPI is different, as it is a discussion, rather than debate on a motion. Members do not vote, rather the Chair announces that the discussion has finished.

At any time during the discussion, a member may move 'That the business of the day be called on'. Members must vote on the motion immediately, and cannot amend or debate it. If agreed to, the MPI discussion ends, and the Legislative Assembly starts the next item of business.

Days when MPIs are discussed

Members discuss an MPI on two out of every three Wednesdays. On the other Wednesdays another debate, known as the grievance debate, occurs. Find out more about grievance debates: *Fact Sheet B1: Types of Debate*.

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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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