



**Legislative Assembly  
Parliament of Victoria**

## **Fact Sheet A4**

### **Government Business Program**

The Legislative Assembly normally sets a government business program each sitting week. The program lists bills and motions which the Assembly must complete that week, usually by 4.00 pm Thursday. Members cannot debate programmed items after that time. Instead, they vote immediately on all unfinished programmed business. Members vote on questions needed to pass a bill and agree to government amendments. There is no vote on most opposition amendments.

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### **History of the government business program**

The Legislative Assembly set the first government business program in 1993.

Members gave reasons at the time, including:

- efficient and effective use of the Assembly's time
- to stop late night sittings
- to stop time-wasting and filibustering, and raise Parliament's standard as a consequence
- to guide when the Assembly will debate bills.

The Assembly has used the government business program since 1993. Despite some changes, the main elements are the same.

### **What is government business?**

Any matter introduced by a minister is called government business. Most items are bills, but they can also be motions, for example to set up a new parliamentary committee inquiry.

## Setting the program for a sitting week

Before a sitting week starts, the government works out which business to program, and can discuss this with the other parties.

When the Legislative Assembly meets, the government proposes which business to program, and the completion time for debate. Members can debate the motion for up to 30 minutes.

Usually the items on the government business program are bills. Occasionally, the government includes other business, for example a motion to agree to the address-in-reply to the Governor's Speech.

## Changing the program

The government can propose an amendment to the program, which members may debate for up to 30 minutes. Changes to the program take effect one hour after the Legislative Assembly agrees to them.

## Procedure at completion time

At the completion time, usually 4.00 pm on a Thursday, the Chair interrupts debate. Members can no longer debate any items on the business program.

If the Legislative Assembly is debating a non-programmed item, the Speaker interrupts the member speaking, and suspends the debate. The debate continues after the Assembly completes all the programmed business. The interrupted member can then finish their speech.

The Chair asks members to vote on all programmed items. The procedure can be complicated, particularly if there are a few programmed bills. In particular, the way the Assembly deals with amendments can be confusing. For more information about how the Assembly amends bills, see *Fact Sheet C4: Amendments to Bills — A Practical Guide*.

We now outline the most common procedures.

### **Second reading debate and reasoned amendment**

Members vote whether to pass the bill's second reading. If a member has moved a reasoned amendment (see *Fact Sheet C5: Reasoned Amendments*), members vote on that first, and then on the second reading.

### **Debating an amendment at the completion time**

If members are debating an amendment to a bill's wording, they vote on that amendment. This is the only way members can vote on an opposition amendment (other than a reasoned amendment) at completion time.

### **Other amendments**

Government amendments are treated differently from opposition amendments. Members vote on any government amendments if they have been public for at least two hours. This happens even if members have not debated the amendments at all.

In contrast, members do not vote on any remaining opposition amendments. Those amendments automatically fail.

## Passing the bill

Members vote on all other questions needed to pass the bill, usually combined into one question. If the third reading needs an absolute or special majority (see *Fact Sheet D3: Altering Victoria's Constitution*), members vote on that question separately.

## Points of order

At the completion time, members cannot take points of order (about procedure or conduct in the Chamber) until the Assembly has dealt with all programmed business.

## Find out what is programmed

The Legislative Assembly usually agrees to the government business program on the Tuesday afternoon of a sitting week. To find details:

web [www.parliament.vic.gov.au](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au) > 'Legislation & Bills' > 'Bills' > choose a bill, check the status details to see if it is programmed

Or [www.parliament.vic.gov.au](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au) > 'Legislative Assembly' 'Assembly Abridged (daily summary)' then choose Tuesday's. This lists bills programmed for the week

email [assembly@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:assembly@parliament.vic.gov.au)

phone Assembly Procedure Office, 03 9651 8563

visit Procedure Office and ask for details

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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.

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