



**Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Victoria**

Fact Sheet B1

Types of Debate

Members speak in various debates in the Legislative Assembly. Different rules and time limits apply for each type of debate. Debates allow members to cover a wide range of issues important to them and their constituents. Most debates are on government bills. Some debates, such as the grievance debate and a matter of public importance, give members the chance to speak on topical concerns.

Bills and motions

Response to the Governor's speech

Budget debate

Grievance debate

Adjournment debate

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Bills and motions

Members' contributions must be relevant to the topic, the bill or motion. This limits what a member can say. The Chair decides whether or not a member's speech is relevant. Time limits vary from five minutes maximum, to an unlimited length of time for the minister who introduces the bill. For a general summary of time limits, see the centre of this fact sheet.

Response to the Governor's speech

At the opening of each session of Parliament the Governor makes a speech outlining the government's plans. The formal response to that speech is a debate called the address-in-reply. Find out more: *Fact Sheet I2: Opening of Parliament*.

Traditionally, the government chooses one of its new members to move the address-in-reply motion. The motion proposes the response to the Governor. The wording of the response 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.

During the address-in-reply debate, members may speak across a wide range of issues. It is often the first chance for a new member to speak in the Chamber.

Budget debate

Appropriation is government spending of public money. Many bills are designed to spend public money, but one in particular sets aside money to be spent during an entire year. This is called the Appropriation Bill, or budget. The debate on this bill is called the appropriation or budget debate.

The Treasurer usually introduces the Appropriation Bill, or budget, in May. The bill outlines how the government intends to spend money throughout the coming financial year. The Treasurer has unlimited speaking time and, at the conclusion of his or her speech, debate is adjourned.

When members resume the budget debate, the Shadow Treasurer normally leads the debate and has unlimited speaking time.

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.

The Appropriation Bill must originate in the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Council can suggest amendments to the bill, but cannot amend it. If the Council does not pass the bill within one month of the Assembly passing it, it automatically goes to the Governor for royal assent.

Grievance debate

Every third sitting Wednesday, members debate the question 'That grievances be noted'. Members use the debate to raise concerns about individual constituents or other significant issues. Each member may speak for 15 minutes. The grievance debate lasts for two hours, or until eight members have spoken, whichever is shorter.

The grievance debate is a chance for wide-ranging debate in the Chamber and is similar to the adjournment debate that takes place at the end of the day.

Adjournment debate

At 10.00 pm, unless a minister moves a motion to continue the sitting, the Chair interrupts debate, and the Legislative Assembly starts the adjournment debate. The bells ring twice to indicate the start of the debate.

The adjournment debate gives members a chance to raise specific issues with the relevant ministers. Members have three minutes each to raise issues. Members request a minister takes specific action on the issue. The total time allocated is 30 minutes, or until 10 members have spoken, whichever is shorter.

Ministers then have a chance to respond to any of those issues within 30 minutes. Ministers not present to respond to issues provide a written response to the member within 30 days.

Find out more: *Fact Sheet B5: Adjournment Debate.*

Statements by members

Each sitting day, members may make statements on any topic of concern. Members often use this time to speak about individual constituents or organisations in their electorate. Members have just 90 seconds to give their statement, and the total time allocated for all members is 30 minutes.

Matters of public importance

Each sitting Wednesday (except when there is a grievance debate) members discuss a matter of public importance immediately after they have finished making statements. Government and opposition members take turns deciding what matter to discuss. Once decided, a member gives the matter to the Speaker for approval.

The discussion lasts two hours. The first government and non-government speakers may speak for 15 minutes maximum. Other members have 10 minutes maximum. As the matter of public importance is a discussion, not debate on a motion, members do not vote on it.

Find out more: *Fact Sheet B3: Matters of Public Importance.*

Statements about parliamentary committee reports

Each sitting Wednesday, members may make statements about any parliamentary committee report (except some reports of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee) tabled during the current parliament. Members may speak for up to five minutes. The total time allocated is 30 minutes, or until six members have spoken, whichever is shorter.

Find out more: *Fact Sheet G2: Parliamentary Committees.*

Condolence motions

When the Legislative Assembly wishes to express sorrow at the death of someone who has served with distinction in the Parliament, members debate a condolence motion. Condolence debates usually take place on sitting Tuesdays. There is no time limit on speeches but members agree between themselves how long they will take.

At the end of the debate, instead of voting on the motion, members stand in silence to show their agreement. The Assembly sometimes adjourns after a condolence motion as a further mark of respect. The length of the adjournment is one hour.

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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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