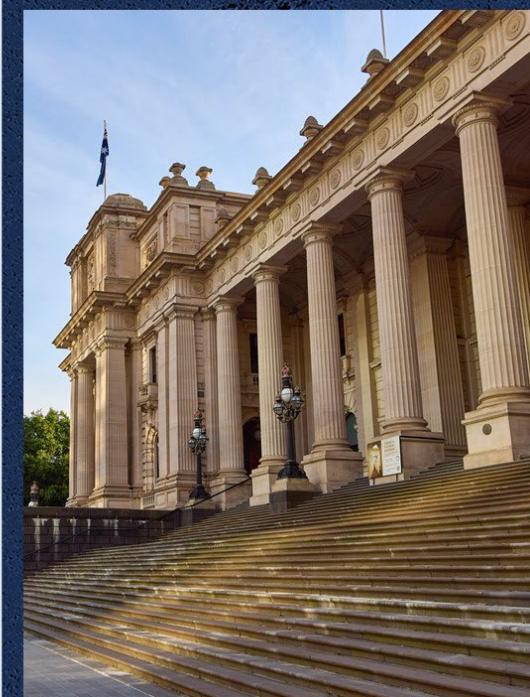


Parliament of Victoria

Parliament of Victoria

Understanding parliament

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria



Teacher guide

Understanding parliament

Using this resource



This slide deck is intended to be used flexibly, to support learning about parliament across a range of audiences. Save a copy of this file to disable 'Read only'. Please feel free to rearrange, add to, or remove slides as you need. The accompanying notes include:

- additional resources (including teaching resources and more information)
- definitions of key terminology
- explanations of each slide

Scan the QR code for the accompanying notes.

 Visit [Understanding parliament](http://www.vicnews/understanding-parliament)
education@parliament.vic.gov.au

Produced by the Victorian Parliaments Community Engagement Unit
Contact education@parliament.vic.gov.au

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria

This slide deck is intended to be used flexibly, to support learning about parliament across a range of audiences. Feel free to rearrange, add to, or remove slides as you need.

Save a copy of the PowerPoint file to disable 'Read only'.

Teacher notes

The accompanying teacher notes are broken into the following themes, following the original structure of the slide deck:

- Parliament
- The work of an MP
- Representation across the two chambers
- The process of making laws
- Committee inquiries
- Engaging with parliament

Each section includes:

- an overview, detailing:
 - the key concepts covered
 - resources, including teaching resources and additional resources
 - key terminology, including parliamentary terminology and any additional vocabulary
- an explanation of the concepts relating to each slide, including:
 - a copy of the slide at the top
 - additional notes or interesting facts

There is some repetition in the explanations across the slide deck as some concepts are interrelated. This allows for flexibility without removing relevant information.

Understanding parliament is produced by the Victorian Parliament's Community Engagement Unit. Contact education@parliament.vic.gov.au

For updates to *Understanding parliament*, visit
vicparl.news/understanding-parliament

Key Resources

Inside parliament – vicparl.news/inside

Inside parliament is a guide to the history, structures, procedures and practices that shape our state parliament.

The three chapters explore Victoria's post-colonial history and the evolution of our parliamentary traditions; the functions of parliament and the roles of our elected representatives; and how Victorians can connect with parliament and contribute to decision-making processes.

Parliamentary glossary – vicparl.news/supporting-resources

The *Parliamentary glossary* includes definitions for key roles in parliament as well as key processes.

You, Me & MPs toolkit – vicparl.news/toolkit

The You, Me & MPs toolkit is designed to support and enhance engagement between culturally and linguistically diverse and faith communities, the Parliament of Victoria and members of parliament (MPs). The toolkit has also been translated into a number of different languages.

Teach and learn

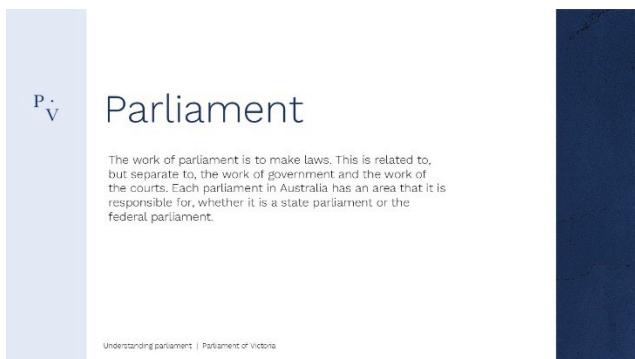
All of Parliament of Victoria's education resources are free to access and download from the Teach and Learn page of parliament's website. Scan the QR code or use the bit.ly to explore further.



Website: Teach and learn

vicparl.news/teach

Parliament



PV

Parliament

The work of parliament is to make laws. This is related to, but separate to, the work of government and the work of the courts. Each parliament in Australia has an area that it is responsible for, whether it is a state parliament or the federal parliament.

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria

Key concepts in this section include:

- the three levels of government
- the Westminster system
- separation of powers
- the functions of parliament

Resources

Teaching resources

The three levels of government flashcards – vicparl.news/3L-Flashcards

The cards consist of 30 different examples of services and issues that are the responsibilities of the different levels of government. A key has also been provided, listing the level of government that has the most responsibility for law-making for each area.

Parliament and the courts: Separation of powers – vicparl.news/separation-of-powers

The three videos in this series feature extracts from a panel conversation covering topics such as what are the separation of powers, evolution of the separation of powers, and the relationship between accountability processes and the separation of powers.

Parliament and the courts: Principles of justice – vicparl.news/principles-of-justice

Members of parliament and the judiciary discuss the principles of justice that inform the process of making, applying and reforming laws. Some of the topics from the eight videos include practical limitations to the principles of justice, different processes for creating equality and reviewing and reforming legislation.

Additional resources

Members of parliament

Browse or search for past or current members. Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/members

What is parliament?

Find explanations of the difference between parliament and government and links to Victoria's Constitution and election processes.

Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/what-is-parliament/

Welcome to parliament

The video explores the role and structure of parliament, along with some key spaces at Parliament House. Visit youtube.com/watch?v=zRu5UiL8OCU&t=1s

Other resources relating to parliament and parliament's work include:

- Parliament of Australia, *Members*, visit aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members
- Vic Councils, *Find your council*, visit viccouncils.asn.au/find-your-council
- Victorian Auditor-General's Office, visit audit.vic.gov.au/
- Victorian Ombudsman, visit ombudsman.vic.gov.au/

Key terminology

Bicameral system – Means ‘two chambers’ or ‘two houses’ that function as a law-making body. The two chambers in Victoria are the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council.

Bill – A proposed law that may become an Act of Parliament (also known as legislation). A bill may be a proposal for a new law or an amendment (change) to a current law. A bill may be introduced in either house of parliament.

Cabinet – The principal decision-making body for the government and includes all ministers. Cabinet is chaired by the Premier and considers significant matters for the state, such as major policies and appointments.

Concurrent – The process of sharing responsibility. In some cases, levels of government may have concurrent powers, or shared responsibilities, to make laws around particular areas. The laws of the state must not contradict the laws of the Commonwealth.

Constitution – A document that outlines how an organisation or institution is to be governed, i.e. the powers and privileges of an organisation or institution. *The Constitution Act 1975* (known as Victoria's Constitution) gives the Parliament of Victoria the power to make laws.

Executive – Consists of the Premier and ministers responsible for implementing laws. Sometimes the executive is referred to as the ‘government’. The Governor is sometimes included as part of the executive when acting on the advice of the Premier.

Houses of parliament – An alternative name given to the chambers of parliament. In Victoria, the two houses are the Legislative Assembly, also referred to as the lower house, and the Legislative Council, also referred to as the upper house.

Judiciary – The court system, responsible for interpreting and applying the law.

Legislation – A law made by parliament, also known as an Act of Parliament.

Legislature – The elected group of people who have the authority to make and change laws. In Parliament of Victoria, there are 128 members of the legislature.

Minister – Government members who have been allocated the responsibility (portfolio) for implementing government policy in specific areas, such as education, health or infrastructure. Ministers oversee the administration of their government departments and are accountable to parliament for their department's actions.

Opposition members – Members of parliament who belong to the largest non-government party or coalition in the Legislative Assembly. The opposition can be made up of members of two or more non-government parties in coalition. Opposition members sit in both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. They present themselves as an alternative to the government party at the next election.

Opposition party – The political party with the second highest number of seats in the Legislative Assembly. The Leader of the Opposition sits opposite the Premier. The opposition party has an important role in holding the government to account and presenting itself as an alternative to the government party at the next election.

Premier – The leader of the party, or coalition of parties, that has formed government. By tradition, the Premier is always a member of the Legislative Assembly. They direct government policy, chair Cabinet and represent the Victorian government at meetings, functions and official ceremonies.

Royal Assent – The final step in a bill becoming an Act of Parliament. This role is performed by the Governor of Victoria, the state's representative of the Sovereign (Crown), who formally accepts the bill. No bill can become law until it receives assent from the Governor.

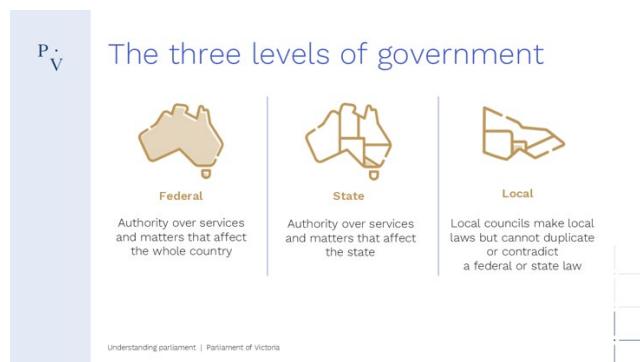
Scrutinise – The process of examining, inspecting or evaluating something closely or thoroughly. There are several processes in parliament to scrutinise the work of government, such as committee hearings and audit processes.

Serjeant-at-Arms – Historically responsible for security in the Legislative Assembly, serving as bodyguard to the Speaker. Today, the Serjeant-at-Arms still has a role in security, along with supporting sitting day procedures, taking minutes, offering procedural advice and delivering messages between the chambers.

Tabling – Also known as 'tabled', is the process of a report being officially presented to parliament. The word comes from the physical act of putting the report on the table in the centre of the chamber.

Usher of the Black Rod – Responsible for security in the Legislative Council and has a role in supporting sitting day procedures and delivering messages between the chambers.

The three levels of government



Explanation

Australia has three levels of government. Each level has a set of responsibilities and a number of elected representatives.

- **Federal** (also known as Commonwealth or national level)
 - 1 member for each of the 38 Victorian electorates in the House of Representatives
 - 12 representatives for Victoria in the Senate
- **State/territory level**
 - 1 representative in the Legislative Assembly
 - 5 representatives in the Legislative Council
- **Local level**
 - between five and 12 councillors in each of the 79 local governments across Victoria

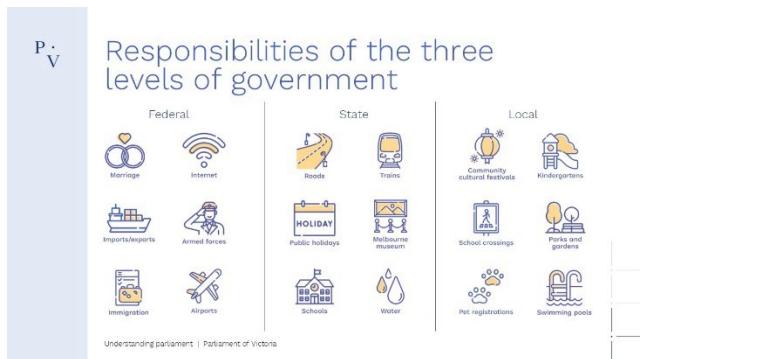
At a federal and state level, the relevant parliament has the responsibility of making laws. At a local level, it is the local government, the local council or shire, that is responsible for making local laws.

Understanding ‘government’: Government and parliament are often confused. In Victoria, parliament includes all 128 members of parliament (not just those belonging to the government party) and is responsible for making the laws (see separation of powers).

The word ‘government’ can mean different things depending on how it is used. For example:

- **systems of government:** referring to the law-making processes, which may include separation of powers, voting systems and the passage of a bill. For example, the Westminster system of government
- **levels of government:** whether the system of government is at a federal, state or local level
- **the government:** also known as the executive (ministers and the Premier), which in Victoria is the Premier and Cabinet
- **the government or governing party:** the political party with the majority seats in the Legislative Assembly (also known as the lower house)
- **the government or government departments:** departments who are responsible for providing services. Each government department has a minister who is responsible for the department

Responsibilities of the three levels of government



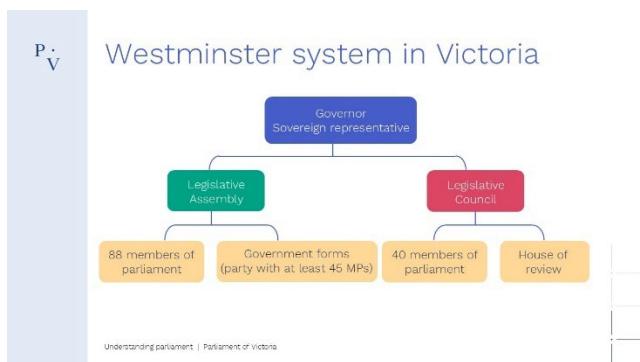
Explanation

Each level of government is responsible for delivering particular services and areas for law-making.

- Federal government (also known as Commonwealth or national government):
 - has authority over services and matters that affect the whole country
 - has areas of exclusive responsibility/power. These areas are outlined in Section 51 of the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* and include defence, foreign policy, airports, communications and currency
 - may sometimes give the states and/or territories money to deliver services
- State/territory government:
 - has authority over matters that are not exclusively the responsibility of the federal government
 - may sometimes choose to refer (handover) a power to the federal government
 - has areas of responsibility that usually include health, schools, agriculture, road safety, law and order, ambulance services, public housing and public transport
- Local government has:
 - no constitutional independence. The state parliament decides what local councils are and are not responsible for. In Victoria this is outlined in the *Local Government Act 1989* and the *Local Government Act 2020*
 - areas of responsibility that usually include garbage collection, local parks and gardens, libraries, swimming pools and sporting facilities

Shared responsibilities: Some powers/responsibilities are concurrent (shared) between federal and state levels, such as taxation and roads. However, if there is inconsistency between the laws, the federal law is applied.

Westminster system in Victoria



Explanation

Parliament of Victoria is modelled on the Westminster system, the system used in the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Some features of a Westminster system are:

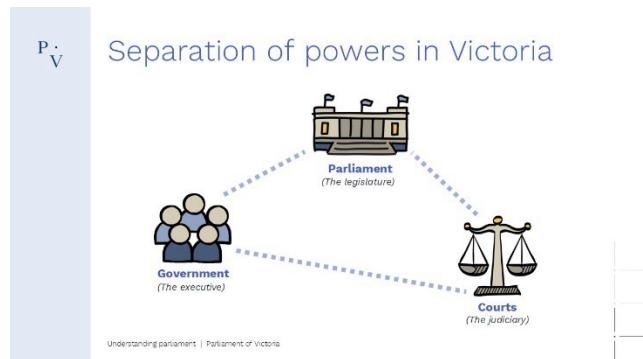
- a head of state who signs bills into law (Royal Assent), and may have other ceremonial duties
 - the Governor exercises the constitutional power of the Head of State in Victoria
- a head of government who is typically the leader of the party with the majority of members in the lower house of parliament
 - In Victoria, this is the Premier who sits in the Legislative Assembly
- an executive made up of ministers who are members of parliament and are part of the governing party
- an independent judiciary

Similarities between Westminster and Parliament of Victoria

- The bicameral structure – Parliament of Victoria has two chambers, the Legislative Assembly (lower house) and the Legislative Council (upper house)
- The process of passing bills through the houses, followed by Royal Assent
- An opposition party – the largest non-government party, whose job is to hold government accountable and scrutinise its decisions
- The use of ceremonial maces or staffs that represents the authority of parliament and/or the crown
 - In the Legislative Assembly the Serjeant-at Arms carries a mace
 - In the Legislative Council the Usher of the Black Rod carries the black rod
- A horseshoe or U-shaped debating chamber, with the government and opposition facing one another, and a curved crossbench

While there are many similarities with Westminster systems across the world, each have evolved over time. For example, there are often differences in how members are elected into parliament.

Separation of powers in Victoria



Explanation

Separation of powers refers to the three separate branches that make up our democratic system.

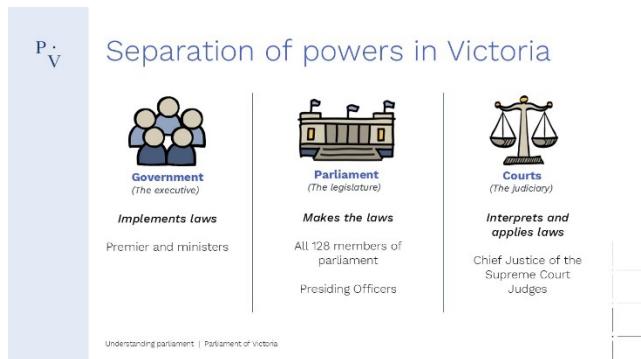
- Parliament (the legislature), responsible for making laws. It includes all the elected members of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council, as well as the Governor.
- Government (the executive), responsible for proposing bills and implementing laws. It includes the Premier and ministers. Ministers are members of parliament who are responsible for running government departments.
- Courts (the judiciary), responsible for applying the law. It includes the courts and judges who interpret legislation and apply the law.

Separation of powers means:

- all branches cannot be controlled by the elected government of the day or by any one party or interest group
- each branch can have checks and balances on each other:
 - for instance, parliament has a role in scrutinising the actions of the executive, and the judiciary may be asked to rule on whether a piece of legislation is constitutional.

The judiciary: The judiciary may be asked to consider whether a piece of legislation meets the requirements of the Constitution. For example, the judiciary may be asked to explore whether a law unnecessarily limits a human right protected by the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

Separation of powers in Victoria



Explanation

Separation of powers refers to the three separate branches that make up our democratic system, including parliament (legislature), government (executive) and the courts (judiciary).

Separation of powers means:

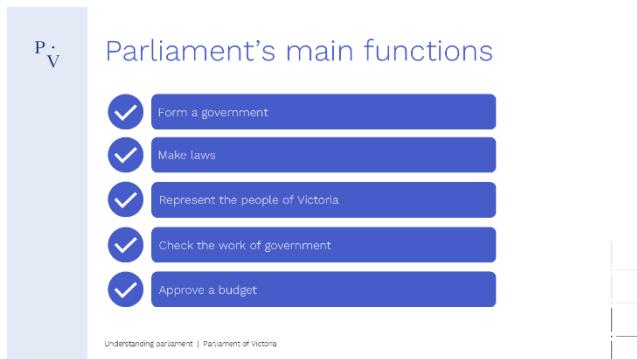
- all branches cannot be controlled by the elected government of the day or by any one party or interest group
- each branch can have checks and balances on each other:
 - for instance, parliament has a role in scrutinising the actions of the executive, and the judiciary may be asked to rule on whether a piece of legislation is constitutional.

Key processes for scrutinising the work of government include the:

- Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and other parliamentary committees
- Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO)
- Victorian Ombudsman
- Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC)
- opposition party and other non-government parties and independent members. For example, asking government ministers and the Premier questions during question time.

VAGO: The Victorian Auditor-General's Office publishes their audit findings, and these reports are tabled in parliament and are publicly available. Past reports have included a review of and follow-up on the accessibility of tram services, an audit of the cybersecurity of IT servers, and an audit of Victoria's recycling targets.

Parliament's main functions



Parliament's main functions

- ✓ Form a government
- ✓ Make laws
- ✓ Represent the people of Victoria
- ✓ Check the work of government
- ✓ Approve a budget

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria

Explanation

The Parliament of Victoria has five main functions:

- to form a government
 - Government is formed by whichever party has the majority of seats (50%+1) in the lower house
 - In the Victorian parliament there are 88 seats in the lower house, so a party must win at least 45 seats to form government
- to make laws that enable the state to function effectively and fairly
 - Proposed laws (bills) must pass both houses of parliament and receive Royal Assent from the Governor to become a law (also known as an Act of Parliament)
- to represent the people of Victoria and raise their concerns publicly
- to scrutinise the work of the executive arm of government
 - The executive arm of government includes the Premier and ministers
 - The work of the executive is scrutinised through the parliamentary committee system, the Ombudsman, and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office
- to authorise and approve a budget
 - Parliament reviews and approves the government's proposed budget each year. This ensures that funds are used responsibly and in line with the state's needs and/or community priorities.

Shortest and longest serving Premiers: In 1952, the Tom Holloway Government held office for the shortest term in Victoria's history, at just 4 days (or 70 hours). The longest-serving government was led by Sir Henry Bolte, who won six elections and served as Premier for 17 years and 78 days.

The work of an MP



Key concepts in this section include:

- the work of an MP in the electorate and at Parliament House
- the structure of a sitting day
- additional roles that MPs might have in the chamber
- how to become an MP

Resources

Teaching resources

Debating In the chamber – vicparl.news/debating

Run a mock debate on any issue or topic using the processes of parliament, with the *How to write a bill template* and *Chamber place cards*. The *How to write a bill template* outlines for students some key questions to consider when writing a bill, including who the proposed law applies to, how it will be implemented, and if there are any penalties for not adhering to the law. The *Chamber place cards* cover some of the key roles for MPs across both of the chambers.

Leadership and advocacy in the classroom – vicparl.news/leadershipadvocacy

This page brings together our leadership and advocacy resources. The range of resources include the two-part video series where MPs discuss their leadership journey and provide advice for young people, as well as perspective cards, teacher guides and posters that can be used in the classroom to support young people to take action.

Electorate data cards – vicparl.news/elect-data-cards

The *Electorate data cards* consist of statistics for each of the 88 lower house electoral districts, and for all of Victoria, from the last Australian Census in 2021. The data provided is a snapshot of some key demographic information such as age distribution and countries of birth, as well as size of the electorate, population, housing types, and some income and expense details.

Parliament of Victoria poster set – vicparl.news/posters

This poster set introduces Members of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council, provides a map of the Victorian state electorates and an infographic on *How a law is made*.

Additional resources

Members of parliament

Browse or search for past or current members. Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/members

What is parliament?

Explanations on how members are chosen and links to how to contact members of parliament.

Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/what-is-parliament/

Hansard

Find out what local members have said in parliament, and how they have voted on bills, by reading Hansard reports on the parliament's website.

Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/parliamentary-activity/hansard/hansard-debate

A guide to member roles and terms

Find a list of members' roles with explanations of the responsibilities in the chamber.

Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/people-in-parliament/member-roles/

How sitting days work

See examples of sitting week schedules for the two chambers and explanations of question time, debate, voting and rules of the chambers.

Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/how-sitting-days-work

Other resources relating to the work of an MP include:

- Victorian Electoral Commission
 - How to become a state election candidate, visit vec.vic.gov.au/candidates-and-parties/become-a-state-election-candidate
 - Victorian Electoral Map, visit maps.vec.vic.gov.au/

Key terminology

Advocating – The process of suggesting an idea or way of doing something or publicly recommending or supporting something that usually involves some change.

Adjournment debate – Happens at the end of a sitting day. It gives members a chance to raise issues with ministers. Ministers can respond immediately in the chamber or provide a written response within 30 days. The written response is then published online.

Bill – A proposed law that may become an Act of Parliament (also known as legislation). A bill may be a proposal for a new law or an amendment (change) to a current law.

Candidate – A person who is standing for election to parliament.

Coalition – Parties that have made a formal agreement to work together in parliament, either in government or opposition.

Electorate – An electorate is a geographical area with a population that is represented by a member of parliament.

Electoral districts (Legislative Assembly) – Victoria is divided into 88 electoral districts for the Legislative Assembly. Voters in each district elect one member of parliament to represent them.

Electoral regions (Legislative Council) – Victoria is divided into eight electoral regions for the Legislative Council. Voters in a region elect five members of parliament to represent them.

Formal business – Includes the administrative issues that the houses deal with. It includes introduction of bills, notices of motions, tabling of petitions, tabling of committee reports, and other documents required by law, messages from the Governor and the other house, motions without and by leave.

General business – Part of a sitting day dedicated to matters that non-government members have introduced to parliament, such as private member bills and motions.

Government business – The opportunity to debate matters that government members have introduced to parliament. This can include bills and motions.

Hansard – A full and accurate record of the sitting of the houses and public hearings of committees. It is used by members of parliament, parliament staff, members of the judiciary, and the broader public. Hansard reporters work alongside a team of broadcast and audio-visual specialists, so that members of the public can watch parliamentary debates and committee hearings.

Independent – A member of parliament that does not belong to a political party.

Leader of the House (Legislative Assembly) – A minister whose role in the Legislative Assembly is to organise government tactics for the house, including the sitting day schedule. This role is different to that of the Premier.

Leader of the Government (Legislative Council) – A minister whose role in the Legislative Council is to organise government tactics in the house, including the sitting day schedule. This role is different to that of the Premier.

Leader of the Opposition (Legislative Assembly) – The Leader of the Opposition is the head of the largest non-government party (or coalition of parties) in the Legislative Assembly. The Leader of the Opposition is an elected member of parliament. They are chosen by other members of their party to lead them in opposition.

Leader of the Opposition (Legislative Council) – A shadow minister who organises opposition tactics and negotiates the sitting day schedule with the government. The Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council should not be confused with the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, who is the alternative Premier.

Legislation – A law made by parliament, also known as an Act of Parliament.

Legislative role – The role of parliament and members of parliament in making laws.

Members' statements – A member's statement can address any topic of concern and has a time limit of 90 seconds. Members often use this time to speak about people, events or organisations in their electorate.

Minister – Members who have been allocated responsibility (portfolio) for implementing government policy in specific areas, such as education, health or infrastructure. Ministers oversee the administration of their government departments and are accountable to parliament for their department's actions.

Opposition members – Members of parliament who belong to the largest non-government party or coalition in the Legislative Assembly. The opposition can be made up of members of two or more non-government parties in coalition. Opposition members sit in both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. They present themselves as an alternative to the government party at the next election.

Opposition party – The political party with the second highest number of seats in the Legislative Assembly. The Leader of the Opposition sits opposite the Premier. The opposition party has an important role in holding the government to account and presenting itself as an alternative to the government party at the next election.

Premier – The leader of the party, or coalition of parties, that has formed government. By tradition, the Premier is always a member of the Legislative Assembly. They direct government policy, chair Cabinet and represent the Victorian government at meetings, functions and official ceremonies.

Political party – An organisation which has a particular philosophy and values that inform their objectives.

President – The Presiding Officer in the Legislative Council. They are a member of parliament who is responsible for maintaining order in the Council, and ensuring debates and processes are conducted according to parliamentary rules.

Presiding Officer – The collective term for the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council. They preside over the proceedings of parliament, chair the meetings of their respective houses and may represent parliament in official parliamentary business.

Question time – An opportunity for members to ask ministers questions about the government's decisions and actions. Question time takes place every sitting day in both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. Question time has three parts: questions without notice, ministers' statements, and constituency questions.

Royal Assent – The final step in a bill becoming an Act of Parliament. This role is performed by the Governor of Victoria, the state's representative of the Sovereign (Crown), who formally accepts the bill. No bill can become law until it receives assent from the Governor.

Sitting day/week – When members meet together, generally at Parliament House, to perform their legislative role. In Victoria, members usually spend approximately 50 days a year in parliament, which means that a significant part of their role takes place in their communities.

Shadow minister – Members of the opposition who have a responsibility for one or more policy areas, known as portfolios. Shadow ministers hold the government to account by presenting alternative ideas and policies about a portfolio area. A shadow minister may have a shadow assistant minister who assists with the portfolio responsibilities.

Speaker – The Presiding Officer in the Legislative Assembly. They are a member of parliament who is responsible for maintaining order in the Legislative Assembly, ensuring debates and processes are conducted according to parliamentary rules.

Standing orders – The permanent rules of procedure for the house. Each house has its own set of standing orders. Members can vote to change the standing (and sessional) orders as needed.

Whip – A member of parliament chosen by their party to organise party members, making sure members are ready to speak in debates and vote in divisions.

The work of an MP: In the electorate



P_V

The work of an MP:
In the electorate

- Help constituents, businesses and community organisations to:
 - access services
 - apply for grants
 - advocate for their needs
- Help to connect people, businesses and services
- Speak at functions and attend community events
- Promote their party's policies

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria

Explanation

Members of parliament are elected representatives of the Victorian people. A significant part of their role takes place in their electorates.

A member of parliament represents the whole of their electorate, including:

- those who voted for them
- those who voted against them, and
- those who did not vote (people under the age of 18, for example)

Every Victorian is represented by:

- one Legislative Assembly member
- five Legislative Council members

Members of parliament are often asked to:

- help constituents, businesses, and community organisations to access services (such as housing), apply for grants, or advocate for their needs
- help to connect people, businesses and services in their communities
- speak at functions and attend community events
- promote their party's policies

Every member of parliament has an office in their electorate and is supported by a small team of electorate officers.

Representation in the community: Most of a member of parliament's work happens in their community, with around 35 weeks a year spent in their electorate. You can find out who your members of parliament are (1 in the lower house and 5 in the upper house) by finding out what state electorate you belong to on the Victorian Electoral Commission's website and then checking the 'Find my member' page on the Parliament of Victoria website.

The work of an MP: At Parliament House

P.V

The work of an MP: At Parliament House

Represent their community by:

- participating in debates on bills (draft laws)
- speaking and asking questions on behalf of their electorate
- presenting petitions

At Parliament House, MPs also:

- meet with advisers and party members
- attend briefings
- attend community celebrations and events
- engage with the media
- attend committee hearings

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria



Explanation

When members come to Parliament House to perform their legislative role, it is called a sitting of parliament. During a sitting week, members contribute to the law-making process by:

- proposing and debating laws
- asking and answering questions
- voting on proposed laws

Members also represent the interests of their electorate and will sometimes:

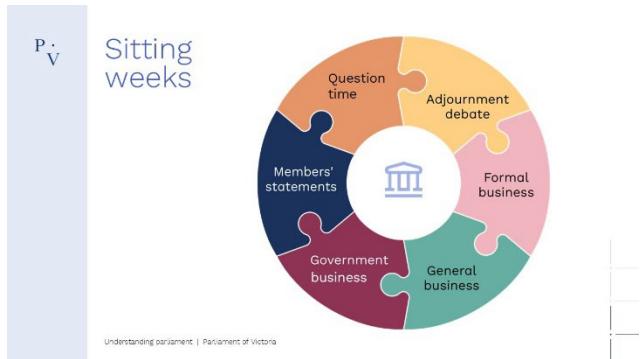
- speak in parliament on their constituents' behalf
- highlight achievements in their community or share information of local importance.
- ask ministers questions on behalf of constituents and present petitions

While members are at Parliament House they may also take part in a number of other activities, including:

- meeting with advisers and party members to discuss strategy, policy and upcoming parliamentary business
- attending briefings to stay informed about current issues and government decisions
- engaging with the media to provide updates and commentary on parliamentary matters
- attending committee hearings to closely examine and investigate important issues in greater detail

Find a member of parliament: The public can find out what their local members have said in parliament, and how they have voted on bills, by reading Hansard reports on the parliament's website.

A sitting week



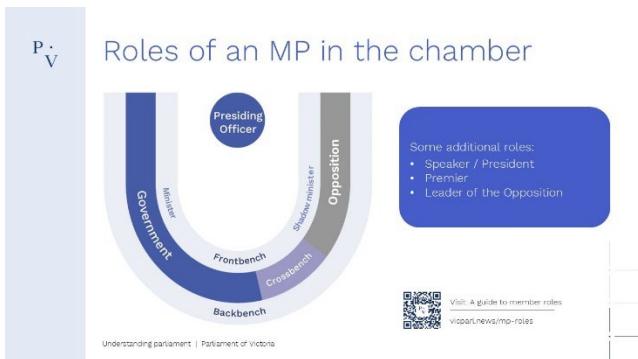
Explanation

Across a sitting week there are different types of speeches and debates that happen.

- Adjournment debate happens at the end of a sitting day. It gives members a chance to raise issues with ministers. Ministers can respond immediately in the chamber or provide a written response within 30 days. The written response is then published online.
- Formal business covers the administrative issues that the houses deal with. It includes introduction of bills, notices of motions, tabling of petitions, tabling of committee reports and other documents required by law, messages from the Governor and the other house, motions without and by leave.
- General business is the part of a sitting day dedicated to matters that non-government members have introduced to parliament, such as private member bills and motions.
- Government business is time spent on debating matters that government members have introduced to parliament. This can include bills and motions. Most of a sitting week is spent on government business.
- A member's statement is an opportunity for members to address any topic of concern and has a time limit of 90 seconds. Members often use this time to speak about people, events or organisations in their electorate.
- Question time allows members to ask ministers questions about the government's decisions and actions. Question time takes place every sitting day in both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. Question time has three parts: questions without notice, ministers' statements, and constituency questions.

Sitting days: The longest sitting day in Victorian history ran 48 hours and 59 minutes (16 December 1924). It involved long speeches, debates and procedural delays designed to prevent a vote on the *Workers' Compensation Amendment Bill*. The tactic was ultimately unsuccessful and the bill was eventually passed into law.

Roles of an MP in the chambers



Explanation

As well as participating in the law-making process and representing their constituents in the chamber, members of parliament may take on some additional roles. These roles often relate to a member's position in the party and whether the party is in government. For instance:

- each chamber has a Presiding Officer, who is responsible for overseeing their chamber's procedure and processes. The Presiding Officers are both members of parliament, and other members vote to appoint them to these roles. In the Legislative Assembly the Presiding Officer is known as the Speaker. In the Legislative Council the Presiding Officer is known as the President.
- the Premier is the leader of the party, or coalition of parties, that has formed government. The Premier is usually a member of the Legislative Assembly and is responsible for government policy and representing Victoria.
- a minister is a government member chosen by the Premier to take on extra responsibilities for one or more policy areas, known as portfolios.
- the Leader of the Opposition is the leader of the largest non-government party or coalition of parties in the Legislative Assembly. They direct the opposition's policies and strategies.
- a shadow minister is a member of the opposition who has responsibility for one or more policy areas, known as portfolios. A shadow minister presents alternative ideas and policies about a portfolio area.

Where the members sit: A member of parliament's party and additional role will help determine where they sit in the chamber. These areas are known as:

- the frontbench, where ministers and shadow ministers sit
- the backbench, where government or opposition members of parliament without ministerial or shadow ministerial roles sit
- the crossbench, where members of parliament who are not aligned with the government or the opposition (for example, independents or minor party members) sit between the government and opposition parties.

Additional roles: Other roles the members of parliament might take on include party whips, Leader of the House in the Legislative Assembly and Leader of the Government and Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council.

Becoming an MP



Explanation

Members of parliament are chosen by Victorian voters at general elections. When a member cannot complete their term, a new member is decided by:

- a by-election in the Legislative Assembly, or
- an appointment in the Legislative Council

In Victoria, general elections are held every four years. There are no special requirements to nominate as a state election candidate (also known as standing for election), but candidates must:

- be enrolled to vote in Victoria
- register with the Victorian Electoral Commission. This includes the candidate getting support for the nomination form from either:
 - a registered political party, if standing for that party, or
 - people enrolled to vote in the potential candidate's electorate, if standing as an independent
- pay a registration fee

There are some conditions that might prevent someone from standing for election, such as, if they:

- have a conviction or are found guilty of a criminal offense with a prison term of 5 years or more
- are a member of federal parliament
- are a judge

Qualifications to be an MP: There are no specific qualifications to be a member of parliament. Some of the jobs members of parliament have had before becoming an MP include lawyers, doctors, small business owners, actors, professional sports people, accountants, electricians, plumbers, journalists, farmers, teachers, psychologists, police officers, firefighters, artists, and scientists, to name a few.

Representation across the two chambers



Key concepts in this section include:

- the bicameral system
- the Legislative Assembly, its electorates and how it works
- the Legislative Council, its electorates and how it works

Resources

Teaching resources

Representation and Democracy – vicparl.news/rep-dem

Through the activities provided in this teaching guide, students can explore how different models of representation affect decision-making, as well as comparing and contrasting direct and representative systems of democracy. Each of the activities asks students to reflect on the ways that different models of representation and decision-making may affect people's perspectives on democracy.

Debating in the chamber – vicparl.news/debating

Run a mock debate on any issue or topic using the processes of parliament, with the *How to write a bill template* and *Chamber place cards*. The *How to write a bill template* outlines for students some key questions to consider when writing a bill, including who the proposed law applies to, how it will be implemented, and if there are any penalties for not adhering to the law. The *Chamber place cards* cover some of the key roles for MPs across both of the chambers.

Leadership and advocacy in the classroom – vicparl.news/leadershipadvocacy

This blog post brings together our leadership and advocacy resources. The range of resources include two video series where MPs discuss their leadership journey and advice for young people, as well as perspective cards, teacher guides and posters that can be used in the classroom to support young people to take action.

Electorate data cards – vicparl.news/elec-data

The *Electorate data cards* consist of statistics for each of the 88 lower house electoral districts, and for all of Victoria, from the last Australian Census in 2021. The data provided is a snapshot of some key demographic information such as age distribution and country of births, as well as size of the electorate, population, housing types, and some income and expense details.

Parliament of Victoria poster set – vicparl.news/posters

A set of posters introduces Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Legislative Council, Victorian state electorates and a *How a law is made* infographic.

How parliament works – vicparl.news/pov-explains

The video series explores various aspects of parliament's work, including the law-making process and the work of committees.

Additional resources

How parliament works – The two houses

Read an explanation of the two houses and their roles, as well as an explanation of when the two houses might conduct a joint sitting.

Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/two-houses/

Members of Parliament

Browse or search for past or current members. Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/members

Key terminology

Bicameral system – Means 'two chambers' or 'two houses' that function as a law-making body. The two chambers in Victoria are the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. They are also referred to as 'houses', the 'lower' and 'upper' house respectively.

Bill – A proposed law that may become an Act of Parliament (also known as legislation). A bill may be a proposal for a new law or an amendment (change) to a current law. A bill may be introduced in either house of parliament.

Black Rod – A black staff (long stick) with a silver crown that is carried by the Usher of the black rod and symbolises their power, including their security responsibilities.

Candidate – A person who is standing for election to parliament.

Clerks – The department heads of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council. They manage the operations of the department and advise the Presiding Officers and members on parliamentary procedures and policy matters.

Coalition – Parties that have made a formal agreement to work together in parliament, either in government or opposition.

Constitution – A document that outlines how an organisation or institution is to be governed, i.e. the powers and privileges of an organisation or institution. *The Constitution Act 1975* (known as Victoria's Constitution) gives the Parliament of Victoria the power to make laws.

Electorate – An electorate is a geographical area with a population that is represented by a member of parliament.

Electoral districts (Legislative Assembly) – Victoria is divided into 88 electoral districts for the Legislative Assembly. Voters in each district elect one member of parliament to represent them.

Electoral regions (Legislative Council) – Victoria is divided into eight electoral regions for the Legislative Council. Voters in a region elect five members of parliament to represent them.

Governor – The representative of the Sovereign (the Crown) in Victoria. Appointed by the Sovereign on the recommendation of the Premier, the Governor of Victoria gives Royal Assent to bills, opens parliament after each general election and represents Victoria at meetings, functions and official ceremonies.

Leader of the Opposition (Legislative Assembly) – The Leader of the Opposition is the head of the largest non-government party (or coalition of parties) in the Legislative Assembly. The Leader of the Opposition is an elected member of parliament. They are chosen by other members of their party to lead them in opposition.

Lower house – An alternative name given to the Legislative Assembly or the house where government is formed and most bills are introduced.

Mace – A ceremonial staff that symbolises the authority of the government. It is carried by the Serjeant-at-Arms.

Metropolitan – A large city with surrounding suburbs, usually with high population density and lots of infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals and roads.

Minor party – A party with one or more members of parliament. They may form part of the government or the opposition through a coalition, or they may sit with independent members on the crossbench.

Premier – The leader of the party, or coalition of parties, that has formed government. By tradition, the Premier is always a member of the Legislative Assembly. They direct government policy, chair Cabinet and represent the Victorian government at meetings, functions and official ceremonies.

President – The Presiding Officer in the Legislative Council. They are a member of parliament who is responsible for maintaining order in the Council, ensuring debates and processes are conducted according to parliamentary rules.

Presiding Officer – The collective term for the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council. They preside over the proceedings of parliament, chair the meetings of their respective houses and may represent parliament in official parliamentary business.

Proportional representation – A system of voting which is used in the Legislative Council elections. When voting for upper house members, voters have the option to select one candidate (voting ‘above the line’) or they must rank five or more candidates (voting ‘below the line’). Candidates win based on a share (quota) of the number of overall votes for the region.

Regional – An area outside of a major capital city such as Melbourne. Usually has less population and less infrastructure.

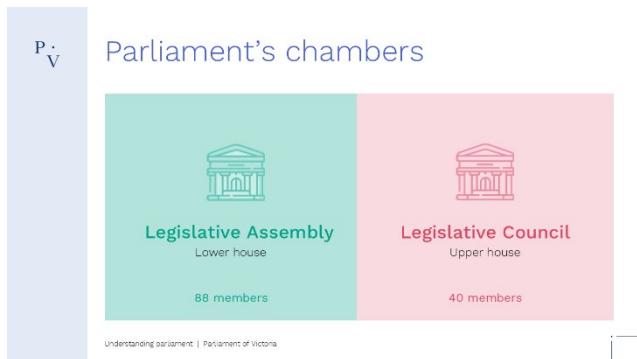
Serjeant-at-Arms – Historically responsible for security in the Legislative Assembly, serving as bodyguard to the Speaker. Today the Serjeant-at-Arms still has a role in security, along with supporting sitting day procedures, taking minutes, offering procedural advice and delivering messages between the chambers.

Speaker – The Presiding Officer in the Legislative Assembly. They are a member of parliament who is responsible for maintaining order in the Legislative Assembly, ensuring debates and processes are conducted according to parliamentary rules.

Upper house – An alternative name given to the Legislative Council or the house where most bills are reviewed and potentially revised.

Usher of the Black Rod – Responsible for security in the Legislative Council and has a role in supporting sitting day procedures and delivering messages between the chambers.

Parliament's chambers



Explanation

The Parliament of Victoria is bicameral, which means it has two separate chambers or houses, the Legislative Assembly (the lower house) and the Legislative Council (the upper house).

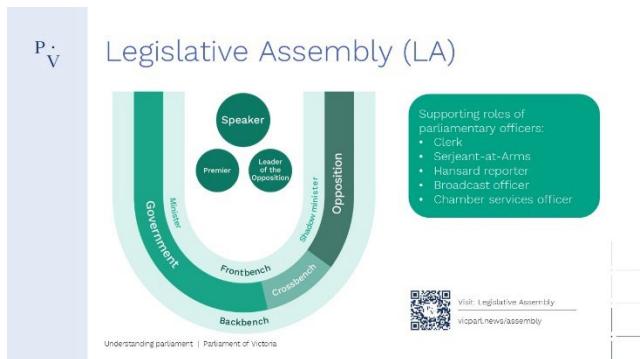
Members of parliament in each chamber are elected separately and the chambers work independently of each other. Some key differences between the chambers are summarised in the table.

Legislative Assembly	Legislative Council
88 Members of Parliament – 1 for each electorate (88 electorates)	40 Members of Parliament – 5 for each electorate (8 electorates)
House where government forms	House of review
Presiding Officer: Speaker	Presiding Officer: President
Serjeant-at-Arms	Usher of the Black Rod
Mace	Black rod
Green	Red
Lower house	Upper house
Premier and Leader of the Opposition	Where the King/Queen (the Crown) or a representative of the Crown (Governor) sits when they visit parliament
Electoral districts	Electoral regions

Each chamber has a set of rules, known as standing orders, that outline what members of parliament can and cannot do or say. Both chambers have similar standing orders, however there are some differences because members of parliament can vote to change the standing orders of the house they belong to. Over time, this has resulted in the chambers having slightly different rules.

Chamber support: There are several apolitical roles, undertaken by parliamentary staff, that support the work of the chambers. These include the Clerks, the Serjeant-At-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod, Chamber Services Officers, Hansard Reports and Broadcast Officers. The Clerks are the most senior unelected staff in the chambers, they advise members on parliamentary rules and procedure.

Legislative Assembly (LA)



Explanation

The Legislative Assembly is the lower house of the Victorian Parliament.

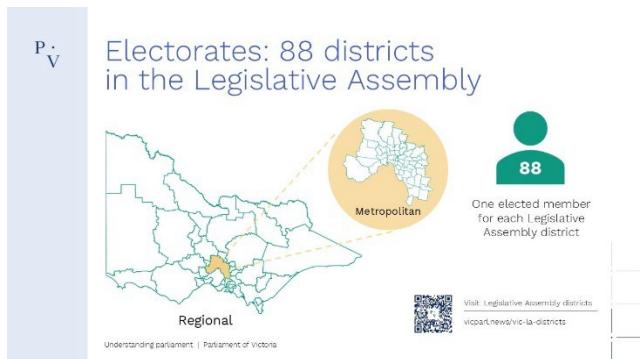
Some key characteristics of the Legislative Assembly include:

- 88 electoral districts, with one representative (member of parliament) per district
- the chamber where government is formed, by the party or a coalition of parties that have the majority of elected members
 - A majority is calculated as 50%+1. In other words, government is formed by whichever party has at least 45 elected members.
- elections every four years to select members of the Legislative Assembly
 - If a member of the Legislative Assembly leaves before the election their replacement is decided through a by-elections. A by-election is just for the registered voters in the electorate of the vacating member.

The Legislative Assembly: The Victorian Legislative Assembly is green, modelled after the lower house of Westminster, the House of Commons.

The Presiding Officer is known as the Speaker and the Serjeant-at-Arms carries the ceremonial mace, which is the symbol of the Speaker's authority.

Electorates: 88 districts in the Legislative Assembly



Explanation

In the Legislative Assembly there are 88 electoral districts.

- There is one member of parliament elected to each of the 88 Legislative Assembly districts.
- The number of electorates in the Legislative Assembly is set out in the Victorian Constitution (the *Constitution Act 1975*).
- Government is formed in the Legislative Assembly by the party or a coalition of parties that have the majority of elected members (50%+1 or at least 45 members of one political party).
- Traditionally, the Premier is a member of the Legislative Assembly.
- Each district has approximately 55,000 voters.
- The electoral boundaries are reviewed by the Electoral Boundaries Commission, supported by the Victorian Electoral Commission and can be reviewed:
 - every eight years or every second state election
 - when there has been a substantial change to the number of voters in an electorate, or
 - there is a change to the number of districts
- The chamber is coloured green and is modelled after the House of Commons in Westminster. Many believe the green represents the green of the grass on the common (courtyard) where the House of Commons may have first met.

Voting for lower house MPs: In the lower house elections are decided by preferential voting. To be elected, a candidate must receive more than 50% of the vote, including preferences. If no candidate receives a majority of votes on the first count, the preferences from the party with the least amount of votes are distributed amongst the remaining parties. This process is repeated until a candidate has a clear majority.

Legislative Council (LC)



Explanation

The Legislative Council is the upper house of the Victorian Parliament.

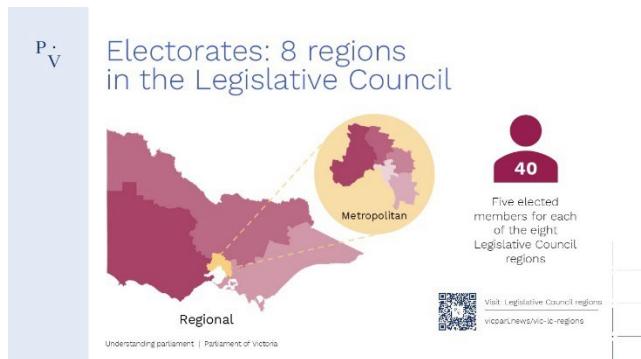
Some key characteristics of the Legislative Council include:

- 8 electoral regions and with five representatives (member of parliament) per region
- the chamber where bills that pass by the lower house are questioned and potentially amended
 - The government does not need a majority in the upper house
- elections every four years to select members of the Legislative Council
 - if a member of the Legislative Council vacates a seat before an election, the member's party is required to nominate a replacement to be confirmed by a joint sitting of parliament
 - if the vacating member is an independent (i.e. did not belong to a political party), the joint sitting will elect a new member. In this case, the chosen individual cannot have held membership in a political party in the past five years and must have lived in the region they will be representing for a minimum of 12 months.

The Legislative Council: The Victorian Legislative Council is red, modelled after the upper house of Westminster, the House of Lords.

The Presiding Officer is known as the President and the Usher of the Black Rod carries the black rod, which is used to announce the President's arrival and to summon the Legislative Assembly members during the Opening of Parliament.

Electorates: 8 regions in the Legislative Council



Explanation

The Legislative Council is the upper house of the Victorian Parliament.

- There are five members of parliament elected to each of the 8 Legislative Council regions. Members are elected for four years.
- The number of electorates in the Legislative Council is set out in the Victorian Constitution.
- The upper house is traditionally considered the house of review, where bills passed by the lower house are questioned and potentially amended.
- It is not necessary for the government to have a majority in upper house.
- Each region has roughly 550,000 voters.
- Members of the Legislative Council may, and sometimes do, initiate legislation. Members of the Legislative Council may not propose appropriation (finance) bills and cannot amend the financial clauses in bills that have started in the Legislative Assembly.
- The electoral boundaries are reviewed by the Electoral Boundaries Commission, supported by the Victorian Electoral Commission and can be reviewed:
 - every eight years or every second state election
 - when there has been a substantial change to the number of voters in an electorate, or
 - there is a change to the number of regions
- The chamber is coloured red and is modelled after the House of Lords in Westminster. The colour red was considered a 'royal colour' as members of the House of Lords are appointed by the Crown and are not elected.

Electing upper house MPs: Elections are decided by a method called proportional representation. This method is used to elect the five members for each region. To be elected, a candidate must receive a certain proportion of the votes for that region.

Processes of making laws



The key concept in this section is:

- the process of passing a bill

Resources

Teaching resources

Parliament of Victoria poster set – vicparl.news/posters

A set of posters introduces Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Legislative Council, Victorian state electorates and a *How a law is made* infographic.

How parliament works – vicparl.news/pov-explains

The video series explores various aspects of parliament's work, including the law-making process and the work of committees.

Debating In the chamber – vicparl.news/debating

Run a mock debate on any issue or topic using the processes of parliament, with the *How to write a bill template* and *Chamber place cards*. The *How to write a bill template* outlines for students some key questions to consider when writing a bill, including who the proposed law applies to, how it will be implemented, and if there are any penalties for not adhering to the law. The *Chamber place cards* cover some of the key roles for MPs across both of the chambers.

Through engaging in the Mission Control program students will think critically about the skills and knowledge needed for a successful mission to Mars, including debating and voting on industries to send on the mission, mirroring Victoria’s parliament processes, and work collaboratively to complete a hands-on design challenge as they consider how to sustainably power operations, feed the population, and communicate across the far reaches of space.

Additional resources

Victorian legislation

The primary source for Victorian legislation. find bills considered by parliament, Acts of Parliament and statutory rules. Visit legislation.vic.gov.au/

Key terminology

Amendment – A change or addition designed to improve a bill.

government bill – A bill (draft law) presented to parliament by a member of the Executive, for example, a minister.

Act of Parliament – Legislation that has passed both houses (Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council) of parliament and received Royal Assent.

Bill – A proposed law that may become an Act of Parliament (also known as legislation). A bill may be a proposal for a new law or an amendment (change) to a current law. A bill may be introduced in either house of parliament.

Consideration in detail (Legislative Assembly) – This step is sometimes taken to examine and vote on each clause of the bill and any amendments. In the Legislative Council, this step is known as ‘Committee of the whole’.

Committee of the whole (Legislative Council) – This step is sometimes taken to examine and vote on each clause of the bill. Amendments may also be debated and voted on. Any amendments must be agreed to by both houses. In the Legislative Assembly, this process is known as ‘Consideration in detail’.

Governor – The representative of the Sovereign (the Crown) in Victoria. Appointed by the Sovereign on the recommendation of the Premier, the Governor of Victoria gives Royal Assent to bills, opens parliament after each general election and represents Victoria at meetings, functions and official ceremonies.

Law – The system of rules which a country or community recognise as regulating the actions of its people and society, and which may be enforced by the imposition of penalties. A law is also the common name given to legislation; bills that have passed through parliament and received Royal Assent.

Legislation – A law made by parliament, also known as an Act of Parliament.

Lower house – An alternative name given to the Legislative Assembly or the house where government is formed and most bills are introduced.

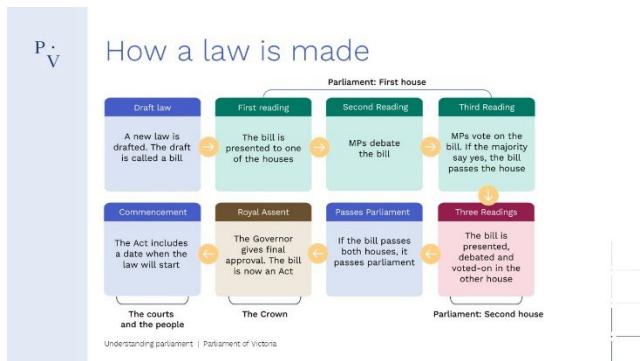
Reading (of a bill) – A formal stage in the legislative process within each house that involves several key steps.

- **First reading:** Introduction of the bill – The long title of the bill is read (this is a short description of the main purposes of the bill).
- **Second reading:** Examining the principles – The general principles and purpose of the bill are explained, and members give speeches to state their position.
 - **Consideration in detail** (Legislative Assembly) or **Committee of the whole** (Legislative Council) occurs after the second reading. It includes an examination and vote on each clause of the bill and any amendments. The houses can decide to skip this stage if there are no amendments and if members do not want to debate individual clauses.
- **Third reading:** Voting on the bill – The bill may be debated again (although debate is limited) and members vote on whether to pass the bill. If the bill passes, it moves to the other house. If it passes the second house, it goes to the Governor for Royal Assent.
- **Private member's bill** – Any member may introduce a bill into parliament. A bill introduced by a member who is not a minister is termed a 'private member's bill'. Most private member's bills are initiated by members of the opposition, minor parties or independents.

Royal Assent – The final step in a bill becoming an Act of Parliament. This role is performed by the Governor of Victoria, the state's representative of the Sovereign (Crown), who formally accepts the bill. No bill can become law until it receives assent from the Governor.

Upper house – An alternative name given to the Legislative Council or the house where most bills are reviewed and potentially revised.

How a law is made



Explanation

Parliament makes laws by passing bills, which are draft laws.

- For a bill to become an Act of Parliament (also known as a law or legislation) it must pass both houses.
 - Each bill is ‘read’ three times in each house. This includes introducing, debating and voting on the bill.
 - 50%+1 of members of parliament vote yes to the bill in both houses.
- Once a bill passes both houses, it must receive Royal Assent.
 - Royal Assent is a process where the Governor of Victoria agrees to make the bill an Act of Parliament (law/legislation) and provides an official seal of approval.

Bills can also be:

- introduced in either house of parliament, however, only the Legislative Assembly (lower house) can propose bills that deal with the raising or spending of money by the government (finance bills)
- a proposal for a new law or an amendment (change) to a current law
- a government bill, which is usually introduced by the relevant minister. For example the Minister for Education would usually introduce a bill relating to education
- a private member’s bill, which is a bill proposed by someone other than a minister

Acts of Parliament: During the 59th Parliament (2018-2022), 198 bills received Royal Assent. One of the largest Acts ever passed in Victoria (*Gambling Regulation Act 2003*) was 632 pages long. The first Act of Parliament (1857) was one page long. It defined the privileges and powers of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly and was given Royal Assent on 25 February 1857.

Committee inquiries



Key concepts in this section include:

- the types of parliamentary committees
- the inquiry process

Resources

Teaching resources

How parliament works – vicparl.news/pov-explains

The video series explores various aspects of parliament's work, including the law-making process and the work of committees.

Law reform case study: Medically supervised injecting centres – vicparl.news/msic

This law reform case study guides teachers and students through the committee inquiry and legislative process that led to the establishment of a Medically supervised injecting centre (MSIC) in Richmond.

Beginning with an overview of the law reform process and the background of MSICs, it provides specific details from the 2017 inquiry, including excerpts from public submissions and committee hearings.

A focus on committees – vicparl.news/focus-on-committees

Join Parliamentary Committee Managers for a special online discussion that explores the role of committees in the law-making process, and provides insights into the ways that individuals, organisations, courts and the media can influence and affect this process.

Engaging with parliament – vicparl.news/Eng-parliament

Download and print your own set of classroom posters outlining the ways people can engage with parliament. Designed as simple flowcharts that include the process, key information and QR codes for more information, these can be used to prompt students to get involved and take part in some of Victoria's democratic systems.

How to host a committee inquiry – vicparl.news/how-to-host

These resources are designed to guide teachers through the process of running a parliamentary committee inquiry with your class, helping students to understand the work of parliamentary committees and the role they play in law reform.

Additional resources

Committees

Committees are formed of members from one house or both houses. Committees hold inquiries into particular issues and call for input from the wider community.

Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/committees

Key terminology

Committees – Groups of members from one house or both houses who conduct investigations (inquiries) into particular issues and call for input from the wider community. The inquiries are managed by the committee and are supported by a small team of researchers from parliament, referred to as the secretariat. Committees prepare reports for parliament, that include findings and recommendations.

- **Minority report** – Occasionally committee reports include a minority report written by one or more committee member/s, who express an alternative view to the majority of committee members.

Political party – An organisation which has a particular philosophy and values that inform their objectives.

Terms of reference – The scope and limitations of an inquiry.

Witnesses – Provides evidence to a committee inquiry based on their expert information or personal experience.

The three types of committees

P_V

The three types of committees

- Standing committees**
Each house usually has five standing committees: three standing committees, each with a specific area of focus, and two that focus on chamber operations.
- Joint investigatory committees**
These committees includes MPs from both the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council.
- Select committees**
Select committees are not common as they are established to look at a very specific issue, and they dissolve at the end of the inquiry.

 [Visit Committees](#)
[Victoria News/Committees](#)

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria

Explanation

Each house (the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council) has two types of committees:

1. standing committees, which last for the duration of parliament
 - o Each standing committee has a particular focus, such as Legal and Social Issues or Economy and Infrastructure.
 - o Committees are referred inquiries that are related to their focus.
2. select committees, which last for the duration of the inquiry
 - o Select committees are established to look at a very specific area of interest or concern.

Joint investigatory committees are made up of members from both houses of parliament. A joint investigatory committee:

- must consist of at least two members of the Legislative Assembly and two members of the Legislative Council
- can be standing committees (lasting for the duration of parliament) or select committees (lasting for the duration of the inquiry)

Each committee is made up of members from different political parties, regardless of whether they are a house committee (either the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council) or a joint committee. Each committee is supported by a small team of researchers and administrative staff.

Committees: Committees generally have a particular focus, such as the environment, infrastructure, social or legal issues. The focus of each committee is decided by the government at the start of each new parliament.

The committee inquiry process



Explanation

Committees are formed by members from one house or both houses. Committees hold inquiries, conduct research into particular topics or issues of concern, and examine the impacts of proposed laws.

Committee inquiries are an opportunity for the public to have input into issues being considered by parliament.

The inquiry process involves six key steps.

1. A committee receives terms of reference including detailed information on what the committee will investigate and the final report due date.
2. A call out for public submissions is made.
 - o Submissions can include people from the wider community, subject-matter experts, or representatives from businesses, community associations and government organisations.
3. The committee conducts public hearings and explores points of interest with witnesses.
 - o Witnesses can include people who have made a submission, subject matter experts or the committee can request the presence of an organisation or individual.
4. The committee may do site visits or consult further with relevant stakeholders and conduct further research.
5. A report is drafted which includes findings and recommendations for the government to consider. The committee releases the final report to the parliament and public.
6. The government is required to respond to a committee's final report within six months and indicate whether it supports any recommendations made in the report.

Committee inquiries: The work of inquiries facilitates an in-depth investigation of issues to assist with better legislative decisions, direct public input into parliamentary and policy processes, public debate and awareness of issues.

Engaging with parliament



PV Engaging with parliament

There are number of ways to be actively involved in democracy in Victoria and Australia more broadly, including participating in parliament.

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria

Key concepts in this section include:

- making a submission to a committee
- being a witness at a committee hearing
- making or signing a petition
- contacting an MP
- other ways to have your say

Resources

Teaching resources

How to host a committee inquiry – vicparl.news/how-to-host

These resources are designed to guide teachers through the process of running a parliamentary committee inquiry with your class, helping students to understand the work of parliamentary committees and the role they play in law reform.

Engaging with parliament – vicparl.news/Eng-parliament

Download and print your own set of classroom posters outlining the ways people can engage with parliament. Designed as simple flowcharts that include the process, key information and QR codes for more information, these can be used to prompt students to get involved and take part in some of Victoria's democratic systems.

How parliament works – vicparl.news/pov-explains

The video series explores various aspects of parliament's work, including the law-making process and the work of committees.

Action and Influence – vicparl.news/Action-influence

This resource explores the different actions people can take to create change, and the nature of their influence, from small-scale, local outcomes to coordinated actions that can have global impact.

Springboard, education e-newsletter – vicparl.news/springboard

Subscribe to receive updates about our education resources, programs and activities that support the teaching of Civics and Citizenship in Victorian schools.

Additional resources

Contacting members of parliament

Further advice for contacting members of parliament.

Visit parliament.vic.gov.au/contacting-members/

Today in parliament

Watch live broadcasts of parliament when it's sitting, visit:

- Legislative Assembly parliament.vic.gov.au/assembly
- Legislative Council parliament.vic.gov.au/council

Alerts, e-bulletins and Parliament of Victoria social media

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Key terminology

Committees – Groups of members from one house or both houses who conduct investigations (inquiries) into particular issues and call for input from the wider community. The inquiries are managed by the committee and are supported by a small team of researchers from parliament, referred to as the secretariat.

Committees prepare reports for parliament, that include findings and recommendations.

- **Minority report** – Occasionally committee reports include a minority report written by one or more committee member/s, who express an alternative view to the majority of committee members.

Electorate – An electorate is a geographical area with a population that is represented by a member of parliament.

Electoral districts (Legislative Assembly) – Victoria is divided into 88 electoral districts for the Legislative Assembly. Voters in each district elect one member of parliament to represent them.

Electoral regions (Legislative Council) – Victoria is divided into eight electoral regions for the Legislative Council. Voters in a region elect five members of parliament to represent them.

Hearings – A formal meeting of the committee to gather information from witnesses on the area of investigation.

Lower house – An alternative name given to the Legislative Assembly or the house where government is formed and most bills are introduced.

Minister – Government members who have been allocated the responsibility (portfolio) for implementing government policy in specific areas, such as education, health or infrastructure. Ministers oversee the administration of their government departments and are accountable to parliament for their department's actions.

Submissions – A written statement submitted to a committee inquiry providing an individual's or organisation's views, experiences and recommendations on the inquiry topic.

Terms of reference – A committee receives a terms of reference from either the Legislative Assembly or the Legislative Council, or a terms of reference can be self-referred by the committee. A terms of reference includes detailed information on what the committee will investigate and the final report due date.

Upper house – An alternative name given to the Legislative Council or the house where most bills are reviewed and potentially revised.

Submission to a committee inquiry



Explanation

Parliamentary committee inquiries provide an opportunity for the community to share their insights and experiences with parliament.

- The committee will invite public submissions by advertising the terms of reference (the guidelines for the inquiry) to the public.
- Interested people, organisations and experts are invited to make either written or occasionally verbal submissions.
- Submissions are reviewed by the committee and published on the committee inquiry page on Parliament of Victoria's website.
 - Personal details, such as contact details, are not published, but names of organisations and individuals are often published along with the submission. People can request for the name to be withheld or for the submission to be confidential.

The submissions are used as evidence by the committee members and, along with public hearings and additional research, inform the committee's report to parliament.

The committee report includes findings of the inquiry and usually recommendations for future work.

Length of a committee inquiry: The length of an inquiry depends on the scope of the inquiry and who the committee wants to hear from. Sometimes a committee inquiry might be about a very specific issue relating to a small area or group of people, and sometimes it might be a broad issue relating to many or all Victorians.

Being a witness at a public hearing



Explanation

Public hearings provide an opportunity for parliamentary committees to investigate an issue by speaking directly to people who have knowledge and views on that topic.

The committee decides who will be invited to give evidence at a public hearing. People may be asked to give evidence as an individual or as the representative of an organisation.

The committee ask questions of the witnesses related to their lived experience and/or their expertise. A committee hearing may include:

- an opening statement from the witness
- questions from different members of the committee
- opportunities for the witness to expand on information provided in their written submission
- an opportunity to provide the committee with additional information relating to the submission or hearing. These are often published on the website as 'supplementary submissions'.

Committee hearings are usually open to the public and broadcast live on the Parliament of Victoria's website. Hansard reports are generally also available for committee hearings.

Occasionally a committee hearing may be closed, for example, if someone is giving evidence that might be highly personal or sensitive.

Giving evidence at a parliamentary committee: Evidence given to a parliamentary committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that no legal action can be taken against someone in relation to the evidence given during a hearing. However, parliamentary privilege will not apply to any comments that are made outside the hearing, even if it is restating what was said during the hearing.

Parliamentary privilege also applies to written submissions, but only after they have been accepted by a committee.

Creating a petition?



Explanation

A petition is a formal document requesting action or support from parliament, that can highlight matters of concern in the community and demonstrate how strongly the community feel about an issue.

Any Victorian can start or sign a petition, even those under the age of 18.

All petitions must include:

- an issue or summary of the problem
- an action, this is what you want parliament to do to fix the problem

There are some general rules for petitions, including:

- petitions can either be paper or electronic (e-petition)
 - e-petitions must be created on the Parliament of Victoria website
- the petition must be on an issue the Victorian parliament has the ability (jurisdiction) to deal with

The two houses have slightly different rules around petitions, the Parliament of Victoria website has all of the specific details.

The petition process includes:

- lodging a request on the Parliament of Victoria website to start the petition
- addressing the petition to either the Legislative Council or Legislative Assembly and finding a member of parliament from the chosen house to sponsor the petition
- collecting signatures for the petition
 - Anyone can sign a petition, including people under the age of 18.

The suffrage petition: The 1891 Great Petition for women's right to vote was 260 metres long with approximately 30,000 signatures. One of the largest petitions presented had over 53,000 signatures calling for increased funding for public libraries. It was presented to the Legislative Assembly in September 2012.

Contacting your MPs

Ways to connect

- Call or email
- Visit an electorate office
- Attend an MP community event in your electorate
- Contact via social media

What to include

- What the issue is
- Why the issue is important
- Any support or actions that you might want

What you might discuss

- Local issues and potential actions
- An invite to an event
- Services or support that might be available or needed
- Petition sponsorship

visit [Find a member](#)
[victoriana/findmember](#)

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Explanation

There are a number of reasons someone might contact one or more of their elected representatives from their state electorates, including:

- one member from the Legislative Assembly or lower house, or
- any combination of the five members of the Legislative Council or the upper house

You can contact a member of parliament if you:

- want to discuss the needs of your local area
- want an issue to be raised in parliament
- wish to discuss a public policy issue
- have an idea for a new law or government project which will improve your community

Some members are also ministers, in charge of a government department. You can contact the relevant department for information about current Victorian laws and government services.

You can email, call, write to or visit a member of parliament's electorate office.

Electorate offices: Every member of parliament has an electorate office and is supported by a small team of electorate officers. When contacting a member's office it is likely that your first contact will be with an electorate officer.

Staying informed



Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria

Explanation

There are a number of ways to stay up-to-date with what's happening in Parliament of Victoria.

The Parliament of Victoria website has:

- broadcasts of both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council during sitting days
- Hansard reports which are an official report of what was said during parliament sittings
- submissions and Hansard reports for committee inquiries, including the final committee report once the inquiry has concluded and the subsequent government response
- news and blog articles about different parliamentary activities

Parliament of Victoria also has:

- social media including Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Bluesky
- a YouTube channel
- regular news and education e-bulletins

Subscribe to our regular email bulletins. Victorians can receive information about the work of parliament and up-to-date news about the issues being considered by parliament.

Staying in touch: The Parliament of Victoria website has all the different ways you can stay up-to-date with what Victorian Parliament is up to, visit parliament.vic.gov.au

Ways to have your say

The infographic is titled 'Ways to have your say' and features a grid of six icons representing different ways to engage with parliament. The icons are arranged in two rows of three. The top row includes: 'Vote in an election' (person at a desk), 'Take part in a peaceful protest' (two people holding a banner), and 'Sign a petition' (person signing a document). The bottom row includes: 'Meet with your local MPs' (two people talking), 'Contribute to an inquiry' (two people at a table), and 'Stand for elected office' (person standing at a podium). The background of the infographic is light blue, and the icons are white with blue outlines. At the bottom left, it says 'Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria'.

Explanation

There are multiple ways people can get involved and have their say, even when they're not old enough to vote. People under the age of 18 can:

- sign a petition
- contribute to an inquiry
- take part in a peaceful demonstration
- contact their members of parliament
- stand for election

To be eligible to vote, someone must be:

- be 18 years of age or older
- be an Australian citizen
- have lived at their current address for at least a month

People can enrol to vote as young as 16 years old, so that they will be ready to vote when they turn 18.

How to vote: Both the Australian Electoral Commission and the Victorian Electoral Commission have more information on how to enrol and how voting works, including support for people who may experience difficulty when voting, due to:

- language barriers
- disability
- geographic location

For more information



For more information

Visit vicparl.news/understanding-parliament
Contact education@parliament.vic.gov.au

Download: Inside parliament
vicparl.news/inside

Visit Parliament of Victoria
www.parliament.vic.gov.au

Understanding parliament | Parliament of Victoria

If you have any questions, would like any additional information or support for your Civics and citizenship program, please contact:

education@parliament.vic.gov.au

Contact Information

For general information about parliament

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