

Inside Parliament

60th Parliament of Victoria

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Inside Parliament: 60th Parliament of Victoria

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Image: Jamie Murcia



Acknowledgement of Country

Long before workers broke ground in 1855, the site of Parliament House served as a traditional meeting place for people of the Kulin Nations – a gum and wattle forest where issues of importance were debated, visitors were welcomed and special events were celebrated.

The Parliament of Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which Parliament House stands, the Wurundjeri people. We also acknowledge Traditional Owners across Victoria, and Elders past, present and emerging.

Yarkeen Mirring (Dreaming Country)

Tom Day III, 2020
Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta and Wemba Wemba

Acrylic on Belgium linen

Tom Day was commissioned by the Parliament of Victoria to create this original artwork for Parliament House, Melbourne.

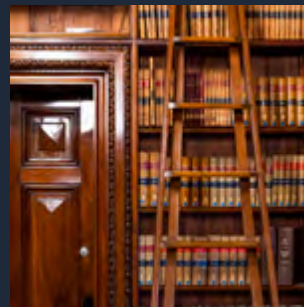
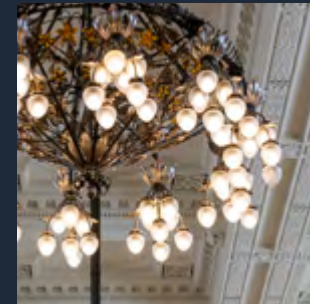
Welcome to the Parliament of Victoria

Inside Parliament is a guide to the history, structures, procedures and practices that shape our state parliament. Whether you are a researcher, a student or simply someone who would like a deeper understanding of our democratic processes, this book offers useful insights and information to support your learning.

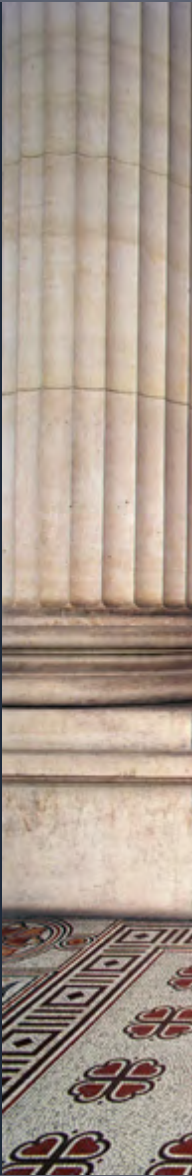
Across three chapters, readers can explore our state's post-colonial history and the evolution of our parliamentary traditions; the functions of parliament and the roles of our elected representatives; and, most importantly, how Victorians can connect with parliament and contribute to decision-making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

The Parliament of Victoria strives to be an open and transparent institution that exists to serve all Victorians. By demystifying the often-complex processes of parliament, this guide aims to foster greater understanding of our state's democratic systems, so that all Victorians have the opportunity to learn how decisions are made on their behalf.

Inside Parliament is an invitation to engage with the parliamentary process. An active and engaged community is essential for a robust democracy, which means everyone has a role to play in shaping the future of our state.



Images: Janusz Molinski (top)
John Gollings (right)





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Chapter 1

History and heritage

OPPOSITE: *Sir Edward Macarthur opening Parliament in the Legislative Council, Melbourne 1856* by William Strutt. Image: Parliament of Victoria.



Formation of Victoria

In 1835, nearly 50 years after British colonisation in New South Wales, two groups of settlers from Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) sailed into Port Phillip Bay. They came ashore on the lands of the Kulin Nations, the banks of the Yarra River, and from this site the city of Melbourne was established.

At that time, settlement in the area had been banned by New South Wales Governor Sir Richard Bourke, but as farmers and businessmen started to migrate from New South Wales and Tasmania, new arrangements for governing were required. In 1836 Governor Bourke created the Port Phillip District and appointed Captain William Lonsdale as the government's Chief Agent. The new district became home to 177 settlers.

The population of Port Phillip District grew quickly, to more than 11,000 by 1841. Residents were granted the right to elect six of the 36 members who would represent them in the New South Wales Legislative Council. An election took place two years later, in 1843, which was the first election and the first form of representative government in Australia.

The newly-elected representatives of Port Phillip District were required to travel to Sydney for Legislative Council meetings and found that they were often outvoted by the larger number of members from northern districts. As a consequence, the proposal for a separate colony



became increasingly popular in the ensuing years, with petitions presented to the New South Wales Governor and Britain's House of Commons.

Through the *Australian Constitutions Act of 1850*, the British Parliament created Victoria, along with South Australia and Tasmania, as self-governing colonies, each with a representative of the Crown (Lieutenant-Governor).

On 1 July 1851, with a population now exceeding 77,000, Victoria officially separated from New South Wales and became a colony of Great Britain. Later that year, Victoria held its first election, where 20 of the 30 members of the new Legislative Council were elected to govern Victoria until 1856. The remaining ten members were chosen by the Lieutenant-Governor.



TOP LEFT: *Richmond punt over Yarra Yarra; where the bridge now stands by William Strutt, 1850.*
Image: Parliament of Victoria.

TOP RIGHT: News of Australian Colonies' bill passing in the UK Parliament, that formalised Victoria's separation from New South Wales, is celebrated in *The Melbourne Morning Herald*, 11 November 1851.
Image: State Library Victoria.



Voting rights were given to men over the age of 21 who were British subjects and owned a substantial amount of property.

The Legislative Council first met at St Patrick's Hall on Bourke Street and some of its first actions included the commissioning of Parliament House and writing a new constitution for Victoria. *The Victorian Constitution Act 1855* introduced a Westminster-style system of parliament, including a 60-member Legislative Assembly.



The first Parliament of Victoria was also the first to be elected by secret ballot. Prior to 1856, voting was public and an employer, for example, could watch how an employee voted and apply pressure to vote for a particular candidate. A running tally was also kept, and if a candidate saw that he was losing, he could round up supporters, sometimes even paying them for their votes. From 1856 votes were cast in secret on an official ballot paper, removing the possibility of intimidation and bribery. The rest of the democratic world eventually adopted this innovation, which was at first known as the Victorian and then the Australian ballot.

CLOCKWISE: St Patrick's Hall, the first Legislative House of Victoria by William Strutt, 1851. Image: Parliament of Victoria.

Counting the ballot papers, David Syme and Co., *The Illustrated Australian News*, 31 July 1880. Image: State Library Victoria.

Delegates at the Australasian Federation Conference at Parliament House, Melbourne, Johnstone O'Shannessey & Co Ltd, 1890. Image: Parliament of Victoria.

The opening of the first Legislative Council by William Strutt, 1851. Image: Parliament of Victoria.

Almost 40 years after the creation of Victoria, in 1890 politicians from the six Australian colonies and New Zealand met at Parliament House in Melbourne for the Australasian Federation Conference. This meeting set the course for the formation of an Australian federation, having resolved to establish the National Australasian Convention that would consider options for a Federal Constitution over the coming decade. Following a series of referendums between 1898 and 1900, Victoria and the other five Australian colonies became states of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901.



A bird's-eye view of Melbourne from the south bank of the Yarra looking north by A. C. Cooke, 1882. Image: State Library Victoria.

Evolution of Parliament House

Overlooking the city of Melbourne from the top of Bourke Street, Parliament House is the meeting place for our state's elected representatives. Its imposing scale and ornate decoration express the ambitions of a different time, yet it remains a focus for gatherings of many kind. It is home to the formal processes of parliament and its grand steps have served as a stage for some of the most significant moments in recent history, where the community comes to celebrate, commemorate or protest.

Conceived in the days of the gold rush and constructed against the backdrop of the burgeoning labour rights movement, in many ways it is a building that encapsulates the social and political history of our state.

Parliament House was built in stages, mostly in the latter half of the 19th Century, but it remains unfinished. Although the grand vision of architects Peter Kerr and John George Knight was never fully realised, it is considered to be one of the most architecturally significant buildings in Australia.

Progress of the Works at Parliament House Melbourne,
The Illustrated Australian News, 23 July 1888.
Image: State Library Victoria.



1854 | The Legislative Council declares that Victoria's new houses of parliament will overlook the city of Melbourne from the top of Bourke Street.

1855 | Architects Peter Kerr and John George Knight are appointed to oversee all aspects of design and construction of Parliament House. Knight will manage the actual site construction, while Kerr will be the head designer. Work commences on Boxing Day.



Architects John George Knight and Peter Kerr. Image: Parliament of Victoria.

1856 | The bluestone Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council chambers are completed in just 11 months, ready for the official opening of the first parliament under Victoria's new constitution, on 25 November 1856.

1860 | The addition of an east wing for the Parliamentary Library is completed. With its grand curved staircases and domed ceiling, it sets the tone for Knight and Kerr's elaborate vision for the building.

1879 | The addition of the Grand Hall and Vestibule connect the two houses of parliament and provide an impressive entry into the growing building. The Grand Hall will later be renamed Queen's Hall, in honour of Queen Victoria.

1888 | The iconic front façade of Parliament House is completed, encasing the bluestone walls of the legislative chambers. Concerns are raised about the cost of completing Knight and Kerr's grand plan but at this time Melbourne is one of the richest cities in the world and work continues at pace.



Construction of the Parliament House façade. Image: Parliament of Victoria.

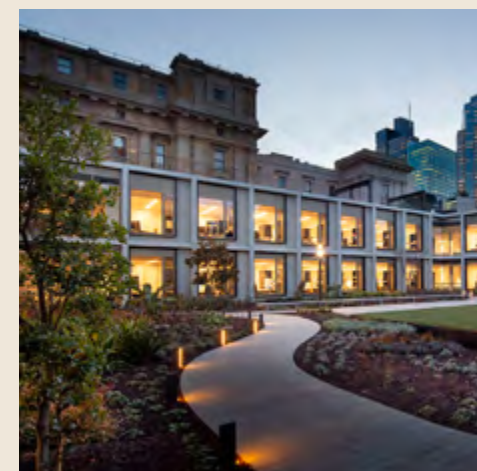
1892 | Sweeping steps and cast-iron lamps complete the Spring Street façade; however, the towering dome for the north wing, along with other planned stages for the building, are put on hold and ultimately abandoned due to a sudden economic downturn.

1901 | The Victorian Parliament relocates to the Royal Exhibition Building and Parliament House becomes home to the first Commonwealth Parliament until the new Australian capital is established in Canberra.

1927 | The Victorian Parliament returns to Parliament House. As a gesture of thanks for its stay in Melbourne, the Commonwealth Parliament finances construction of the north-east wing for use as refreshment rooms, which were completed in 1929.

2006 | Major restoration of stonework across the entire building commences. The project combines 21st Century technology with 19th Century skills to protect and preserve Parliament House as a functioning building for generations of Victorians to come.

2016 | Construction commences on a contemporary office building behind Parliament House to accommodate members of parliament. The new Members' Annexe, designed by Peter Elliott Architecture + Urban Design, is officially opened in 2018.



Parliament House Members' Annexe. Image: John Gollings.

Parliament of Victoria through the years

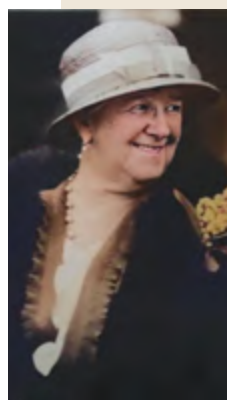
The Parliament of Victoria is both an enduring and evolving institution. On the one hand, it serves as a stabilising force, providing a platform for diverse voices to be heard and for issues to be debated and resolved through democratic means. The structure of parliament, with its established rules and procedures, also provides a degree of continuity and predictability in the political process. On the other hand, parliament is also a responsive institution that must adapt to changing societal needs and evolving contexts.

Through the laws that it enacts and the regular revision of its own rules, parliament both initiates and responds to change in the interests of the Victorian community. This is illustrated through historical changes to voting rights and efforts to diversify representation within parliament.

Many of the early voting laws in Victoria included restrictions on who was eligible to vote, such as gender, land ownership and financial requirements. Even when some of these restrictions were lifted, other requirements, such

as literacy tests, were put in place that created barriers to participating in elections, especially for people who had not received conventional Western education. The requirements for voting eligibility in Victorian elections disproportionately affected Aboriginal peoples. This was progressively addressed through federal and state legislation, including the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1962*.

In Victoria, women were given the right to vote in 1908. This was after many years of campaigning and petitioning for change. It wasn't until 1923 that women were allowed to stand for parliament and Lady Millie Peacock became the first female member ten years later, in 1933. The 1930s saw two more female members elected to parliament: Ivy Weber and Fanny Brownbill. Over time, more women took up roles in political parties, but it wasn't until the 1990s that the number of female members started to increase significantly, and Victoria had its first female Premier, the Honourable Joan Kirner.



- 1856** | The first Victorian Parliament under the new constitution is elected, in a world first secret ballot.
- 1857** | The Victorian Constitution is changed so that every male over 21 years of age can vote in Legislative Assembly (lower house) elections. However, certain additional criteria, such as land ownership, are also applied.
- 1891** | The Great Petition requesting the right to vote for women is tabled in parliament. The petition is approximately 260 metres long and 20cm wide. It includes close to 30,000 signatures written on paper and pasted on to fabric.
- 1908** | *The Adult Suffrage Act 1908* is passed, allowing women the right to vote in Victorian elections. It is the 19th bill on women's suffrage introduced to parliament since 1889.
- 1924** | Women are permitted to stand as candidates in Victorian parliamentary elections.
- 1926** | Compulsory voting is introduced for eligible voters in Legislative Assembly elections. Voting in Legislative Council elections would not become compulsory until 1935.
- 1933** | Lady Millie Peacock becomes the first female member of the Victorian Parliament, elected to the Legislative Assembly in a by-election.
- 1954** | Queen Elizabeth II opens the 2nd session of the 39th Parliament of Victoria on 25 February.
- 1962** | *The Commonwealth Electoral Act 1962* gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women the right to vote, including in Victoria's elections.

Following the 2022 election, 40 women were elected to the 88-seat Legislative Assembly, and 21 women were elected to the 40-seat Legislative Council.

In 1979 Cyril Kennedy became the first person of Aboriginal heritage to be elected to the Victorian Parliament, followed by his brother Andrew David Kennedy in 1982. The first Aboriginal female member, Lidia Thorpe, was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 2017 followed by Sheena Watt, who was appointed to the Legislative Council in 2020. Other significant moments for Aboriginal peoples in this parliament include the 1997 apology for the past policies of removing Aboriginal children from their families and the 2000 special sitting, when Elders from the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung language groups addressed parliament to discuss Aboriginal reconciliation.

Over time, there has been an increase in the number of members who have either been born overseas or bring a diverse cultural heritage to this parliament, which can also influence change. For example, Giovanni Sgro, an Italian immigrant, became the first member to express his cultural identity on the parliament floor, in 1979, by speaking in Italian during his inaugural (first) speech. Since this time, several members have acknowledged their cultural identity by speaking in their first language during key speeches.

Parliament has also seen a greater diversity in the age of its members. In early parliaments, almost all members were between 45 and 64 years old. After the 2018 election, approximately one third of members were aged between 25 and 45, with an unprecedented number of sitting members who were also parents to babies and young children. Changes to parliamentary rules and procedures, and the provision of appropriate facilities at Parliament House are some of the ways that parliament has responded to this demographic shift.

These changes refer to the diversity of representation, but parliament also changes the way it operates to respond to the needs of the day. The rules of debate are periodically reviewed and the number of seats in parliament has also been adjusted over time. More recently, changes were made to parliament's operations during the 2020 pandemic, to keep members and staff safe. These included opportunities for members to participate in debates remotely through either audio or audio-visual links, limiting the number of people in the chamber, and modifying the processes members used to cast their votes.

The evolution of parliament is an ongoing process, as it continually adapts and responds to the needs and expectations of the Victorian people.



1975

The Constitution Act 1975 is passed as an Act of Victoria rather than an Act of the UK Parliament, ending Victoria's strongest legal tie to the United Kingdom.

1979

Gracia Baylor and Joan Coxsedge become the first women elected to the Victorian Legislative Council.

Cyril Kennedy becomes the first person of Aboriginal heritage to be elected to the Victorian Parliament.

1986

The Australia Acts 1986 (passed concurrently by the Parliaments of the Commonwealth, the states and the United Kingdom) confirm that the state powers conferred on the Crown be exercised by the Governor instead.

1990

Joan Kirner becomes Victoria's first female Premier.

2003

Changes are made to Victoria's Constitution, including fixed terms of parliament and rules about how the lower and upper houses interact.

2015

The Aboriginal Flag is permanently flown at Parliament House. An Acknowledgement of Country is incorporated into each sitting week.

2017

Lidia Thorpe becomes the first Indigenous woman elected to the Victorian Parliament in November 2017, representing the seat of Northcote.

2020

Sheena Watt is the first Aboriginal woman appointed to the Legislative Council.

Chapter 2

People and processes

OPPOSITE: The sandglass in the Legislative Assembly, once used to time proceedings in the chamber, has long since been replaced by more contemporary technologies that are used to administer the rules of debate. Image: Janusz Molinski.



Three levels of government

Australia has three levels of government: federal, state/territory and local. Each is responsible for providing a range of different services; however, some of these services overlap.

Federal

The federal government has authority over services and matters that affect the whole country. Section 51 of the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* (The Constitution) gives the federal government exclusive powers, such as those relating to defence, foreign policy, airports, communications, and currency. Only the federal parliament can make laws about federal matters but there are some powers that are concurrent (shared). This means that both federal and state parliaments can make laws about these matters, like taxation and roads for example. Where a power is concurrent, and federal and state/territory laws are found to be inconsistent, the federal law is applied.

State and territory

State and territory governments have authority over matters that are not exclusively the responsibility of the federal government. Examples include health, schools, agriculture, road safety, law and order, ambulance services, public housing, and

public transport. A state or territory government may sometimes choose to hand over (refer) a power to the federal government. And the federal government may sometimes give the states and/or territories money to deliver services and instruct them on how it should be spent, like particular education, health or transport projects for example.

The Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory have their own governments, which have a similar relationship to the federal government, however, they do not have the same constitutional independence as the states.

Local

Local governments, called city or shire councils, are usually responsible for services such as garbage collection, local parks and gardens, libraries, local planning, and sporting facilities. What local councils are and are not responsible for is decided by state parliaments. This is because local councils make local laws, but these laws cannot duplicate or contradict a federal or state law. Local councils have no constitutional independence.

In Victoria, the *Local Government Act 1989* and the *Local Government Act 2020* define the powers of local government. This means state parliament can decide to give local councils more or less authority. In some circumstances, it may even vote to suspend local government councillors and reallocate their responsibilities for a period of time.

The homes of our federal, state and one of our local governments: Parliament House, Canberra (top), Parliament House, Melbourne (middle), and Melbourne Town Hall (bottom). Images: Adobe Stock.



The Victorian Constitution

Known formally as the *Constitution Act 1975*, the Victorian Constitution is the main document that defines the powers and privileges of the parliament, and sets out the features of its three key components:

- the Legislative Assembly
- the Legislative Council
- the Sovereign, represented by the Governor.

The constitution is a law and parliament has the authority to amend it. Some of the most significant changes happened in 2003. These included:

- the introduction of fixed, four-year terms for both houses of parliament
- new voting arrangements for the Legislative Council; for example, election by proportional representation
- the removal of the Legislative Council's power to block the budget
- a new dispute resolution process for bills that do not pass both houses
- a limit to the Victorian Parliament's ability to make major change to sections of the constitution.

Since these 2003 amendments, any proposals for a major change to the constitution, such as the number of members elected to parliament, must be decided by a referendum after first passing through both houses of parliament.

There are still some changes that may be passed without a referendum, by either a special majority (three fifths of all members), an absolute majority (more than half of all members), or a simple majority (the majority of members present). In 2004, for example, the constitution was amended without a referendum when members passed a bill to recognise Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land and their contribution to the state of Victoria—*The Constitution (Recognition of Aboriginal People) Act 2004*.

Separation of powers

The term 'separation of powers' refers to the idea that there are three separate branches that make up our democratic system: parliament, government and the judiciary. This means all branches cannot be controlled by the elected government of the day or by any one party or interest group. It is their separation and independence that allows them to act as checks and balances on each other. For instance, parliament has a role in scrutinising the actions of the executive, and the judiciary is sometimes asked to rule on whether a piece of legislation is constitutional.



Parliament

Also known as the legislature, parliament makes laws. It includes the elected members of the Legislative Assembly, the Legislative Council and the Governor.



Government



Also known as the executive, the government is responsible for implementing laws. It includes the Premier, ministers and the Governor. Ministers are members of parliament who are responsible for running government departments.



Judiciary

This system is made up of the courts and the judges who interpret legislation and apply the law.

Representation in parliament

<p>Legislative Assembly districts</p>  <p>88</p> <p>There is one elected member representing each of the 88 Legislative Assembly districts</p>	<p>Legislative Council regions</p>  <p>40</p> <p>There are five elected members representing each of the 8 Legislative Council regions</p>
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Every Victorian is represented by six members in the Parliament of Victoria: one in the Legislative Assembly and five in the Legislative Council. Whether or not they are in government, all 128 members of parliament have a role to play in making laws and representing the interests of their communities in parliament.

Members of parliament are elected by the people who live in a particular electoral region or district. While there are some eligibility requirements to stand in an election, such as being a resident of Victoria and an Australian citizen, there are no formal qualifications required to nominate as a candidate. Elected members of parliament have a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds.

Elections and by-elections

In Victoria, each parliament is elected for a fixed four-year term. Elections for both houses are held on the last Saturday in November in an election year.

If a Legislative Assembly member resigns or dies between elections, a by-election is usually held in that member's electoral district. The by-election determines who will represent the district until the next general election.

If a member of the Legislative Council resigns or dies, a replacement member may be chosen by a joint sitting of both houses of parliament. There are rules that determine how this should be carried out, for example, if the member being replaced was an endorsed member of a political party then the replacement member must also be of the same party.

Electorates and voting

Every voter in Victoria lives in two state electorates— an electoral district for the Legislative Assembly and an electoral region for the Legislative Council.

Legislative Assembly districts represent approximately 50,000 voters and there are roughly 550,000 voters in each Legislative Council region.

In the Legislative Assembly, a candidate who obtains an absolute majority of all formal, first-preference votes cast in their electorate is declared the winner. An absolute majority is 50% plus one. If no candidate has an absolute majority, a process of distributing voter preferences takes place:

- The candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is taken out of the running, and their second preferences are distributed among the remaining candidates.

- If no candidate has an absolute majority after the distribution of second preferences, then the preferences of the candidate with the next-lowest number of first preferences are distributed.
- This process continues until one candidate has an absolute majority and becomes the member of parliament for that electorate.

The Legislative Council has multi-member electorates, where voters choose five candidates to represent their region using a system of proportional representation. This system can be summarised in the following way:

- Candidates who receive a quota of first preference votes (the minimum number of votes needed to win a seat) are elected.
- Any surplus votes of the winning candidates are transferred to the remaining candidates based on the voters' second preferences.
- If no candidate reaches the quota after the first count, the candidate with the fewest first preference votes is eliminated, and their votes are transferred to the remaining candidates based on each voter's next preferences. This process continues until all five seats in the region are filled.



More detailed information about electorates and the voting systems used in Victoria is provided by the Victorian Electoral Commission.

www.vec.vic.gov.au

Forming a government

Following an election, the party with the most seats in the Legislative Assembly will form a government and take on the responsibility for determining how state services are run, proposing new laws and administering existing laws.

To form a majority government in Victoria, a party must win at least 45 of the 88 Legislative Assembly seats.

A coalition government can be formed when two parties have formally agreed to collaborate and together they hold at least 45 seats.

A minority government can be formed if a party falls short of the required 45 seats but has the informal support of one or more minor parties or independent members.

The party system

In Victoria, the party system is similar to those in other parliamentary democracies, with multiple political parties competing for seats in parliament. A political party is a group of people who share common ideas and values. They work together to win seats in parliament where they can attempt to form government or influence legislation and government policy.

Although most members of parliament belong to a political party, it is also possible to be elected as an independent member. Both the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council are typically made up of members from a combination of major and minor parties, as well as independent members.

In early Victorian parliaments, the lack of a strong party system meant that support for the government could change dramatically and, as a consequence, governments changed frequently.

In the 1940s, three main political parties emerged—the Liberal, Labor and National parties. In the early 2000s there was a rise in the number of minor parties represented in parliament, which was made more likely due to the Legislative Council's change to proportional representation.



In the early years of the Victorian Parliament, a government's term in office was generally much shorter than today, and it was not uncommon for a member to take on the role of Premier more than once in their career. Factors like the emergence of the party system have meant that, in more recent decades, the average term in office is around three times longer than those early years.

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 members

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).

In the community

Members usually spend 50-60 days a year in parliament, which means that a significant part of their role takes place in their communities. They are often asked to help their constituents solve problems related to local matters or government departments. They may represent their electorate's concerns to ministers and government departments, private companies, and to the parliament.

Every member has an office in their electorate and is supported by a small team of electorate officers. A member's work in the community can include:

- helping constituents, businesses, and community organisations to access services (such as housing), applying for grants, or advocating for their needs
- helping to connect people, businesses and services in their communities
- speaking at functions and attending community events
- promoting their party's policies.

At Parliament House

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, and voting on proposed laws. Members will sometimes speak in parliament on their constituents' behalf, highlight achievements in their community or share information of local importance. 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.



On committees

Many members of parliament join parliamentary committees, which are set up at the start of each term of parliament. Committees hold inquiries and conduct research into particular topics or issues of concern, and examine the impacts of proposed laws.

Each committee is made up of members from different political parties, and from one or both houses of parliament. They are supported by a small team of researchers and administrative staff.

As part of a committee's inquiry process, the public may be asked to contribute their views. This can include people from the wider community, subject-matter experts, or representatives from businesses, community associations and government organisations. At the end of an inquiry, committees report their findings and recommendations to parliament and the government is asked to provide a response.



CLOCKWISE: The public can watch members at work in the parliamentary chambers, all debates are streamed live on parliament's website.

Queen's Hall in Parliament House plays host to a range of events that enable groups and organisations to connect with their elected representatives.

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

Inside the parliamentary chambers

The Parliament of Victoria is bicameral, which means it has two separate chambers or houses: the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. These are also referred to as the lower house and the upper house. Members of parliament in each chamber are elected separately and the chambers work independently of each other. Clerks, Hansard reporters and chamber staff are the only non-members of parliament allowed on the floor of the chambers when parliament is sitting.

The Presiding Officers

The Speaker in the Legislative Assembly and the President in the Legislative Council are members of parliament responsible for maintaining order in their respective houses. They ensure that debates and processes are conducted according to established parliamentary rules. These rules are set out in the constitution and in the standing and sessional orders of the houses. Standing orders are permanent rules of procedure and sessional orders are temporary rules that apply until the next election.

The Presiding Officers also:

- represent their respective houses in official dealings with other parliaments and organisations
- perform important ceremonial duties, for example, meeting delegations to the parliament
- have responsibility for the overall management of Parliament House and its precinct.

Although they are usually members of a political party, the Presiding Officers are required to serve objectively. They control debates but rarely participate. Each Presiding Officer has a deputy, and there are a number of members who act as the Speaker or President, taking turns chairing the debate across each sitting week.



In 2003, Judy Maddigan (left) became Victoria's 33rd and first female Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and Monica Gould (right) was elected Victoria's 18th and first female President of the Legislative Council.

Members' roles

Within parliament there are several different roles that a member might have in relation to their position in the party and whether their party is in government.

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 and represent the Victorian Government at meetings, functions and official ceremonies.

Leader of the Opposition

The leader of the largest non-government party or coalition in the Legislative Assembly. They direct the opposition's policies and strategies and present themselves as an alternative Premier at an election.

Ministers

Members who have been allocated responsibility for implementing government policy in specific areas, known as portfolios, such as education, health or infrastructure. Ministers oversee the administration of their government departments and are accountable to parliament for their departments' actions.

Shadow ministers

Members of the opposition who have responsibility for one or more policy areas, known as portfolios. A shadow minister presents alternative ideas and policies about a portfolio area.

Parliamentary secretaries

Members who assist ministers with their portfolio responsibilities.

Leader of the House (Assembly) and Leader of the Government (Council)

Ministers in the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council who organise government tactics in their respective chambers, including the sitting day schedule. These roles are different to that of the Premier.

Manager of Opposition Business (Assembly) and Leader of the Opposition (Council)

Shadow ministers in the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council who organise opposition tactics in their respective chambers and negotiate 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.

Cabinet and shadow cabinet

The cabinet is the principal decision-making body for the government and includes all ministers. Cabinet is chaired by the Premier and considers significant matters of state, such as major policies and appointments. When shadow ministers meet, they are called the shadow cabinet.

Whip

A member assigned to organising party members, making sure they are ready to speak in debates and vote in divisions.

Frontbenchers

Ministers and shadow ministers are known as the frontbenchers, as they sit in the front row.

Backbenchers

Members who are not ministers or shadow ministers. They sit behind the ministers, on the backbench.

Crossbenchers

Any member who is not from the parties in government or the opposition. They can be a member of a minor party or an independent.

Minor parties

Minor parties have a small number of elected members. They may form part of the government or the opposition through a coalition, or they may sit with the independent members on the crossbenches.

Independents

A member who does not belong to or represent any political party.

Coalition

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



16 December 1924

The longest sitting day in the Victorian Parliament's history ran for 48 hours and 59 minutes. 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.

13 November 1992

The Legislative Assembly concluded a sitting week that was notable for a series of long days, totalling 93 hours and 23 minutes. This was one of the first sitting weeks following the 1992 election and included a sitting day that ran for 26 hours and 30 minutes. Topics that were debated related to gaming, superannuation, education and transport.



Legislative Assembly

Government is formed in the Legislative Assembly by the party (or a coalition of parties) that has the majority of elected members. There are currently 88 electoral districts set out in the Victorian Constitution, and therefore 88 members of the Legislative Assembly. Government is formed by whichever party has at least 45 elected members.

Assembly green

The green of the Legislative Assembly is a tradition that has been adopted from the British House of Commons. The reason why the lower house is furnished in green is unclear, but there are different theories. One is that green was an inexpensive colour and the Commons had to make do with cheaper decorations than the nobles' use of red in the House of Lords.



The mace

Originally a medieval weapon, the mace is now a ceremonial symbol of the Speaker's authority in the Legislative Assembly. At the opening of each day's proceedings, the Speaker is escorted into the chamber by the Serjeant-at-Arms who carries the mace. In 1892, the parliament's mace was stolen and has never been found. There is still a reward on offer for its return.

Legislative Council

The Legislative Council serves as a 'house of review', examining the actions of the government. This provides parliament with an opportunity to consider bills a second time. It is not necessary for the government to have a majority in this house. The Council may, and sometimes does, initiate legislation, but it may not propose appropriation (finance) bills and it cannot amend the financial clauses in bills that originate in the Legislative Assembly.

Council red

The colour of the Legislative Council is a tradition that comes from the British House of Lords where, in the early days of British democracy, the monarch would have met their nobles in a room decorated in red. In those times, red dyes were very expensive and red was worn only by the wealthy and powerful. Red is a traditional colour for royalty and it is in the Legislative Council that the Crown's representative in Victoria opens each new session of parliament.



The black rod

The black rod is carried into and out of the Legislative Council by the Usher of the Black Rod, a title that comes from the British House of Lords. While the President is in the chair, the black rod stays on display in the chamber as a symbol of the Usher's authority to enforce the President's control over proceedings.



Image: Adobe Stock



How a law is made

Parliament makes laws by passing bills, which are proposed laws that may become Acts of Parliament—also known as legislation—once they pass both houses and receive Royal Assent.

During the 59th Parliament (December 2018 to November 2022), 198 bills received Royal Assent, which means they passed both houses of parliament and received approval from the Governor to become Acts of Parliament.

A bill may be introduced in either house of parliament; however, only the lower house (the Legislative Assembly) can propose bills that deal with the raising or spending of money by the government (finance bills).

A bill may be a proposal for a new law or an amendment (change) to a current law.

A government bill is usually introduced by the relevant minister. A private member's bill is a bill proposed by someone other than a minister.

Introducing a bill to parliament begins a process of checks and balances that are intended to ensure the proposed legislation is in the best interests of the community and does not present a risk of unintended consequences. The following process describes the typical stages that are involved in making and changing laws in the Victorian Parliament.

1st reading

This stage introduces the bill.

A member of one house introduces the bill and reads its full title. At the first reading, the house decides whether it wants to consider a bill on this topic. This is usually followed by a motion to schedule the second reading.

2nd reading

This stage considers the principles of the bill.

The second reading speech is when the member who introduced the bill to the house explains its purpose and principles in more detail. The member must provide an explanation of how the proposed law or amendment is compatible with the rights set out in the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

A division is a method of taking a vote in parliament. When a decision for a division is made in the chamber it prompts the ringing of the division bells. Once the bells stop, all members in the chamber must vote. The names of those who voted and how they voted are recorded in the official minutes and published in Hansard.



In 2003, one of the largest Acts passed by the Parliament of Victoria, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, was given Royal Assent. It was 632 pages long.

The first Act of the Parliament of Victoria was just 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.

Following this speech, debate on the bill is usually adjourned to give members time to study it in more detail.

When next called on for debate, members can give speeches in which they will share their views on the bill. This can take several days or weeks and, at the conclusion of the debate, members vote on the bill. If it is supported by a majority of members, the bill proceeds to the next stage.

After the second reading, the bill may be considered clause by clause. This process gives members the opportunity to ask questions, propose amendments and vote on each of the clauses.

3rd reading

This stage is an opportunity for the house to vote on the final version of the bill.

Members may debate the bill at the third reading stage, but this is unusual. If the members pass the bill at this stage, it is then sent to the second house, where this process is repeated.

Passing both houses

When the process is repeated, the second house can make or suggest amendments. Messages are passed between the two houses throughout this process to ensure that there is agreement on the amendments and, if the bill passes, that it is expressed in exactly the same way in both houses.

Royal Assent

Royal Assent is the process by which a bill receives formal approval to become an official Act of Parliament. This role is performed by the Governor of Victoria, our state's representative of the Sovereign (Crown). No bill can become a law until it receives assent from the Governor.

Commencement

The commencement of an Act of Parliament is the date from which it comes into effect, and therefore the date from when the law applies. In Victoria, this can be a day specified in the Act itself or on a day decided by the Governor on the advice of the government.



Supporting the work of parliament

The Parliament of Victoria has five main functions:

- to form a government
- to make laws that enable the state to function efficiently and fairly
- to represent the people of Victoria and raise their concerns publicly
- to scrutinise the work of the executive arm of government
- to authorise and approve a budget.

The work of parliament is supported by the Department of the Legislative Assembly, the Department of the Legislative Council and the Department of Parliamentary Services. While each has its own set of distinct responsibilities, all three are focused on the smooth running of parliament.

Because staff are employed by parliament, not government, their roles are non-partisan, or apolitical, which means they support the work of all elected members regardless of their party or the political views they hold.

Some roles are unique to parliament and others are like those found in many other organisations or businesses, including information technology, finance, and human resources, for example. Parliament also has teams responsible for catering, maintaining the buildings and grounds, caring for parliament's heritage collection, and ensuring that the community can get involved with the work of parliament – for example, by contributing to a committee inquiry, visiting Parliament House or taking part in workshops and seminars.

Some of the specialist roles at parliament, described below, have long histories that have evolved over many hundreds of years, from the Westminster traditions developed by the UK Parliament.

Clerks

Clerks are the department heads of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council. They manage staff and advise on parliamentary procedures. When parliament meets, the Clerks in both houses sit at the table in front of the Presiding Officers, known as the Speaker in the Legislative Assembly and the President in the Legislative Council.

The role of the Clerk originates from the Westminster traditions of the UK Parliament, as early as 1315. Because many members could not read or write at that time, the Clerk would read the bills out loud and ensure members were kept informed about what was happening in the house.

Today the Clerks' main role is to advise the Presiding Officers and other members of parliament on procedural matters and record the official decisions made in the house.



Providing advice to members is one of the primary responsibilities of Legislative Council Deputy Clerk Anne Sargent. Image: Janusz Molinski.

Serjeant-at-Arms and Usher of the Black Rod

Both the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of Black Rod are traditional roles adapted from the Westminster system. The Usher of the Black Rod dates back to the 14th Century Order of the Garter and was appointed by the Crown to protect the knights when they met. The Serjeant-at-Arms was also responsible for security, serving as bodyguard for the Speaker, using a mace as a weapon. Today, both positions still have a role to play in security and order at Parliament House, acting on behalf of the Presiding Officers, and they also oversee matters relating to occupational health and safety and visitor management. The Serjeant and Usher also support sitting-day procedures, taking minutes, offering procedural advice and delivering messages between the chambers.

Hansard reporters

All formal proceedings in parliament, including sitting days and committee public hearings, are recorded and reported in a document called Hansard. This is a full and accurate record of debates and questions, which is used by members of parliament, parliament staff, members of the judiciary, and the broader public.

To produce Hansard, reporters work in teams. They monitor the chamber and transcribe in turns, progressively publishing the record of debates over the course of the sitting day. Hansard is published on parliament's website and a final set of bound volumes is produced for each chamber at the end of each sitting year.



Hansard reporters and audio-visual technicians work together to document the debates that take place in both parliamentary chambers.

The practice of reporting parliamentary debates began in England in 1803, as a newspaper supplement. In 1812, printer Thomas Curson Hansard took over publication of these records and the practice is named after him. Early debates in the Victorian Parliament were published by *The Argus* newspaper and parliament took over the responsibility for reporting its proceedings in 1866.

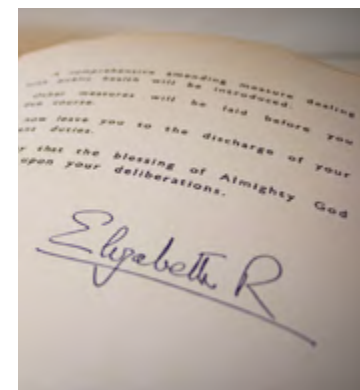
Today, Hansard reporters work alongside a team of broadcast and audio-visual specialists, so that members of the public can watch parliamentary debates and some committee hearings live on parliament's website.

Parliamentary librarians

The Parliamentary Library is Victoria's second-oldest library, established on 14 November 1851. Today it continues to operate as an important source of impartial information, research and analysis for Victoria's members of parliament and their staff.

Parliamentary Library staff provide a range of services and resources that support members in their legislative role as well as their work in the community, including papers on upcoming bills, statistical surveys and briefing papers.

Library staff may conduct research in response to specific requests from members, but they also pay close attention to the topics being debated in the legislative chambers, to ensure members have timely access to in-depth, balanced analysis and insights on the issues of the day.



CLOCKWISE: The Premiers' Portrait Collection, a William Strutt sketchbook, a signed speech delivered by Queen Elizabeth II, and a gold miner's scales are just some of the artefacts in the care of the Parliamentary Library.

In addition to managing a large collection of print and digital publications, the Parliamentary Library also maintains a rich collection of art and artefacts. This collection tells the story of parliament's own history and key moments from our state's history, including eyewitness accounts of the Eureka Stockade, the flag flown over the Royal Exhibition Building at the commencement of federation, and signed copies of speeches given by Queen Elizabeth II upon her visit to the Victorian Parliament in 1954.

Significant legislation in Victoria's history

The laws enacted by parliament have a significant impact on the lives of Victorians and reflect the values and priorities of the state.

As the needs and priorities of the community change over time, laws can continue to evolve and amendments are frequently made to ensure they are achieving their intended outcomes.

These selected examples from Victoria's recent history are just some of the many important pieces of legislation passed by the Victorian Parliament.



Aboriginal Lands Act 1970

Provided for the transfer of certain lands in Victoria to Aboriginal ownership, management and control, including the former missions at Framlingham and Lake Tyers.



Motor Car (Safety) Act 1970

Required motorists and their passengers to wear seat belts in their cars. Victoria was the first place in the world to make the use of lap-sash

belts compulsory in both front and rear seats — all other Australian states and territories followed by the end of 1971.

Crimes (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act 1975

Repealed the sections of the *Crimes Act 1958* that provided for the death penalty as a possible punishment for certain offences.

Equal Opportunity Act 1977

Prohibited discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, marital status, physical or mental disability, political or religious beliefs, or sexual orientation in employment, education, and the provision of goods and services.



Shop Trading Hours Act 1977

Regulated the trading hours of shops and businesses in Victoria, setting out when they were allowed to open and close.

Road Safety Act 1986

Set out a framework for the use of roads and vehicles in Victoria. It includes provisions for driver licensing, vehicle registration and roadworthiness, road rules and traffic enforcement, and the regulation of road transport industries.



Road Safety (Bicycle Helmets) Act 1990

Required all bicycle riders in Victoria to wear a helmet that complies with specified safety standards when riding on public roads and paths. A

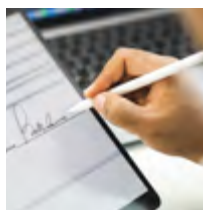
first of its kind in Australia, the law was introduced to reduce the number and severity of head injuries sustained by cyclists in accidents, and to encourage more people to take up cycling as a form of transportation or recreation.

Domestic Animals Act 1994

Set out the laws for the ownership, breeding and sale of domestic animals in Victoria. It includes provisions for the identification and registration of dogs and cats, the regulation of breeding and sale of dogs and cats, and the control of dangerous dogs.

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998

Established the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), which is responsible for resolving a wide range of disputes in Victoria, including those related to tenancy, planning and consumer affairs.



Electronic Transactions (Victoria) Act 2000

Provided a legal framework for the use of electronic transactions in a secure and reliable manner, giving contracts, agreements

and other legal documents created and stored electronically the same legal effect as their paper-based counterparts.

Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001

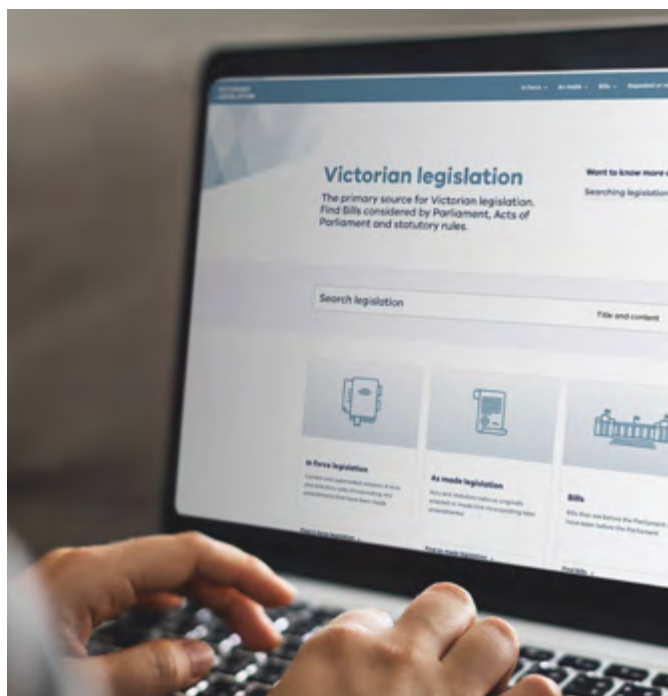
Made it unlawful to incite hatred against someone on the grounds of their race or religion. It also provided a civil remedy for victims of racial or religious vilification.

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Enshrined human rights into Victorian law and established the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The charter sets out the rights and freedoms that all Victorians are entitled to, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and the right to equality before the law.

Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017

Legalised voluntary assisted dying in Victoria, making it the first state in Australia to do so. The Act allows terminally ill patients who meet certain criteria to access medical assistance to end their lives.



legislation.vic.gov.au is the official portal for accessing and publishing Victorian legislation, including Acts, regulations and rules. It provides current and historical versions of legislation, as well as related information and documents, such as explanatory memoranda and second reading speeches.



Agriculture Reform Act 2020

Set out a new regulatory framework for Victoria's agriculture sector, with the goal of making it more efficient, competitive and sustainable. This included

the establishment of Agriculture Victoria as a new statutory authority responsible for supporting the agriculture sector.

Spent Convictions Act 2021

Established a scheme to limit the disclosure of certain convictions, either automatically after a period of time or upon application. The Act also makes it an offence to disclose information about a spent conviction or obtain information about a spent conviction through either fraudulent or dishonest means.

Images: Adobe Stock

Chapter 3

Participating in parliament

OPPOSITE: The corridors of Parliament House become a hive of activity on sitting days, when members and their advisers come from across the state to carry out the business of parliament. Image: Janusz Molinski.



Knowing who to contact

Australia's three levels of government are responsible for different services and issues.

Every Victorian is represented by six members at the state level, 13 at the federal level, and up to 12 representatives at the local council or shire level.

This means there are many people who are available to hear from the community about a range of needs or concerns.

Knowing who to talk to depends on where you live and what you want to talk about. The information provided in this table aims to help you navigate the different levels of government and locate the right people, with links to relevant contact information.

Contacting your local member

Every Victorian is represented by six members in the Parliament of Victoria: one in the Legislative Assembly and five in the Legislative Council. People can raise matters of concern with their local members by contacting them at their electorate office. A member may help a constituent navigate relevant government services, or they might raise the matter in parliament. Issues raised by constituents might influence members and inform party policy and legislation.

	Example responsibilities	Representatives	Contact details
Local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubbish collection • Local roads • Local parks and recreation facilities • Libraries • Pet control 	<p>Local councillors:</p> <p>Between 5 and 12 in each of the 79 local governments across Victoria</p>	<p>Contact details for all local councils:</p> <p>viccouncils.asn.au/find-your-council</p>
State government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transport • Major roads • Education • Hospitals • Police 	<p>Victorian state members of parliament:</p> <p>1 representative in the Legislative Assembly</p> <p>5 representatives in the Legislative Council</p>	<p>Find out who represents you in state parliament and how to contact them:</p> <p>parliament.vic.gov.au/members</p>
Federal government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defence • Immigration • Foreign Affairs • Universities • Marriage 	<p>Federal members of parliament:</p> <p>1 member in each of the 38 Victorian electorates in the House of Representatives</p> <p>12 representatives for Victoria in the Senate</p>	<p>Find out who represents you in federal parliament and how to contact them:</p> <p>aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members</p>

Having your say

Voting

Voting is an opportunity for eligible Victorians to support the candidates they believe would best represent them in parliament.

Victoria uses versions of the preferential voting system, which work differently for lower house and upper house elections. When voting for members in the lower house, the voter must rank all candidates on the ballot paper in order of their preference. 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').

If a ballot paper is not filled in correctly, and the voter's preferences are not clear, the vote may be declared informal and not counted.

If voters are unable to attend a polling place in their region or district because of illness, absence or disability, they may submit a postal vote. In a state election, voters can cast their vote at any polling place in Victoria, even if they are outside of their own electorate.



In March 1856, Victoria became the first legislature anywhere in the world to introduce a secret ballot. The practice of completing a ballot paper in secrecy continues to this day and has been adopted in democratic voting systems across the world. It aims to protect voters from pressure to vote in a certain way and from discrimination due to their preferences. When secret voting was later adopted in the United States, it was called 'the Australian ballot'.

Image: Adobe Stock

Parliamentary committees

Parliamentary committees investigate and report on proposed laws and important matters on behalf of the parliament. In doing so, they help raise awareness of issues and encourage public discussion. This process, known as an inquiry, is an opportunity for members of the public to share their views with parliament.

Parliament usually gives a committee instructions to investigate an issue, called 'terms of reference'. The terms of reference are advertised to the public. Interested people, organisations and experts are invited to make either written or verbal submissions. Public submissions provide the committee with an opportunity to hear the community's views.

Members of a committee may conduct site visits and inspections as another way of engaging with specific communities or organisations.

Public hearings are also conducted, which allow the committee to hear directly from invited witnesses, some of whom might have made a written submission. Members of the public and the media are welcome to attend these hearings, and they are often held in various locations across Melbourne and regional Victoria. Hansard produces a transcript of proceedings, which is published on parliament's website, and many public hearings are also able to be viewed online.

Findings and recommendations from the committee are documented in a final report that is presented to parliament, and the government has six months to provide a response. Committee reports may prompt parliament to amend or create new legislation.

Visit parliament's website to find out about current committee inquiries, including details on how to make a submission or attend a hearing. Regular news articles about the progress of inquiries are also published online, along with the committee's final report.

parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries

Petitions

A petition is a request for action signed by the community. Victorian residents can organise a petition to alert the Victorian Parliament to matters of concern in their community and to demonstrate how strongly the public feel about an issue.

Anyone can sign a petition, including people under the age of 18.

Petitions can be presented to the lower or upper house in paper or electronic form. There are some requirements that must be met for this to happen, for example it must be sponsored by a member of parliament.

More information about starting and signing petitions is available on parliament's website.

parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/petitions



Image: Public Records Office Victoria

Arguably the most famous petition in Victoria's history was presented to parliament in 1891. Known as the 'Great Petition' (pictured above), it requested the right to vote for women. Approximately 260 metres long, it contains close to 30,000 signatures written on paper and pasted on to fabric.

One of the largest petitions received by the Victorian Parliament, with over 53,000 signatures, called for increased funding for public libraries. It was presented to the Legislative Assembly in September 2012.

Staying informed

Website, social media and email

The Parliament of Victoria provides information for the community through its website, social media channels and regular email bulletins. Victorians can receive information about the work of parliament and up-to-date news about the issues being considered by parliament.

Read the latest news


 parliament.vic.gov.au/news

Find us on social media:

 @VicParliament

 @VicParliament

 @victorianparliament

 @parliamentofvictoria

 [linkedin.com/company/parliament-of-vic](https://www.linkedin.com/company/parliament-of-vic)

Sign up for email updates

 parliament.vic.gov.au/subscribe

Hansard and live broadcasts

Hansard is the official and permanent report of parliamentary debates and committee hearings. Members of the public can access Hansard to read speeches made by members and find out how bills are progressing.

All parliament sitting days and some public committee hearings are broadcast live on parliament's website for the public to watch.

Read Hansard

 parliament.vic.gov.au/hansard

Watch parliament

 parliament.vic.gov.au/video

Tours, visits and engagement programs

The Parliament of Victoria serves all Victorians and works to engage and collaborate with the community through various programs, events and experiences.

Parliament is committed to providing opportunities for groups that experience barriers to participation in our state's democratic processes, including people who live remote from parliament, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, young Victorians, and people with disabilities.

Parliament offers a range of consultation projects, training programs, as well as in-person and online activities, to inform the community about Victoria's democratic system and other related topics. Additionally, parliament offers tours and educational programs for schools focusing on parliamentary processes and the history of Parliament House.

On sitting days, members of the public can watch parliamentary proceedings from the public gallery, promoting transparency in decision making and allowing the community to understand parliamentary processes.



Tours of Parliament House provide visitors with an opportunity to explore the spaces in which our state's laws are made.



Image: State Library Victoria

Taking action

Peaceful protests

The right to protest and the right to peaceful assembly are fundamental features of our democratic system. Protests are a way for ideas and concerns to be expressed by the public. The steps of Parliament House have seen Victorians raise their voices in protest on many issues, and the types of protest action can take many forms — from one person holding up a placard or sign, to thousands of people marching in the streets. Gathering at the steps has also been used to demonstrate other public sentiment, such as pride, grief and celebration.

Workers in Victoria were among the first in the world to secure an eight-hour day, in 1856. This was the result of advocacy, protests and lobbying over several years, led by stonemasons working on the construction of the University of Melbourne and Victoria's Parliament House. Pictured left, workers celebrate the eight-hour day on Spring Street in 1900, an achievement that is still commemorated with the Labour Day public holiday,

Party membership

People can be a member of a political party without being a member of parliament. Political parties exist at various levels – small local branches, regional organisations, and state and national executives. By becoming involved with a party that shares their political values, party members help to shape party policy and select the party's candidates to stand for election.

Lobbying

Lobbying is the act of trying to influence decisions made by government officials or other people in positions of power. It is typically done by individuals, organisations or groups who want to promote their interests or advocate for specific policies or legislation. Lobbyists use various methods such as personal meetings, phone calls or email correspondence to persuade decision-makers. The goal of lobbying can vary depending on the interests of the group or individual involved.