

DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australia had little say in how they were governed from the time of official European settlement in 1836 to 1851, when a partly-elected, partly-appointed Legislative Council was established.

A new Constitution Act was proclaimed in South Australia in 1856 to provide for a bicameral (two-house) Parliament. The two houses were to be known as the House of Assembly and the new Legislative Council.

The first State Parliament met on Wednesday 22 April, 1857.

Currently the House of Assembly has 47 members, each of whom represents an electorate which has roughly the same population of about 21 000 voters. The Legislative Council has 22 members, each of whom represents the whole of the State. The life of the Parliament is limited to four years, but the House of Assembly may be dissolved sooner by the Governor on the advice of the Premier in certain circumstances.

Further Reading: “The Parliament of South Australia”

Prepared in the Office of the Clerk of the House of Assembly

BAND B

- 1 Look up a definition of democracy.
- 2 Give an example of democratic decision making in your home.
- 3 Give an example of democratic decision making at school.
- 4 Choose one item from the timeline sheet and research what was happening at this time in South Australia besides the information given.
- 4 Do you think our Parliament in South Australia is a true democracy or a representative democracy? Find out how a representative democracy works?

RESEARCH

Select one of the events on the South Australian History Timeline and research the following about that event:

- What happened?
- Why was it significant in South Australia's history?
- How has it changed the citizen's of South Australia's lives today?

TIMELINE

- 1836 28 December South Australia was proclaimed a Colony – the Governor and four Government Officials nominated by the Governor formed the Legislative and Executive
- 1843 Legislative Council enlarged by the admission of four members who were not Government officials but were nominated by the Crown
- 1843 20 June The Governor decided to admit strangers to witness proceedings of the Council therefore a new building was needed
- 1843 10 October new Council Chamber was opened
- 1851 21 February ordinance passed which provided for a Council of four nominated official members, four nominated non-official members and 16 representatives to be elected from the electoral districts. The Governor ceased to preside over the new Council and the title of Speaker was given to the presiding officer.
- 1856 24 October Constitution Act was proclaimed by which South Australia was granted responsible government under a bicameral system
- 1857 2 February the old Legislative Council ceased to exist
- 1858 22 April First Parliament was opened by His Excellency, The Governor. It consisted of 36 House of Assembly Members and 18 Legislative Council Members were elected by adult males with property qualifications.
- 1863 Administration of the Northern Territory taken over by South Australia.
- 1887 South Australian Constitution Act amended to pay members of parliament
- 1889 House of Assembly moved from Old Parliament House to the first stage of the new building. A bridge connected two buildings for access to the Legislative Council and Parliamentary Library in Old Parliament House.
- 1890 At the general election 54 Members of Parliament (including two for the Northern Territory) were elected by adult male voters.
- 1894 Constitution Amendment Act passed to grant voting rights to women and allowing women to stand for Parliament.
- 1895 Women voted for the first time in the general election.

- 1900 The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act received Royal Assent and a Proclamation was issued uniting the States as the Commonwealth of Australia as from 1 January 1901.
- 1901 South Australia became a State within the federation of the six self-governing colonies of the Commonwealth. House of Assembly reduced to 42 members.
- 1911 Northern Territory (previously administered by South Australia) was taken over by the Commonwealth Government. House of Assembly reduced from 42 to 40.
- 1934 Sir Langdon Bonython donated promised 100,000 pounds to build the second stage of the building of Parliament.
- 1939 New Parliament House opened by His Excellency the Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, Premier, Sir Thomas Playford, President of the Legislative Council, Sir David John Gordon, Speaker of the House of Assembly, Sir Robert Nicholls.
- 1944 First state election was held with compulsory voting for the House of Assembly.
- 1959 First women members elected to Parliament – Joyce Steele (Liberal Party) (House of Assembly) and Jessie Cooper (Liberal Party) (Legislative Council)
- 1970 House of Assembly increased to 47 electorates.
- 1971 The qualifying age for voting was reduced to 18.
- 1972 Full adult voting rights for the Legislative Council with the abolition of property qualifications.
- 1985 Voting for the Legislative Council made compulsory
- 1986 Australia Acts passed

SENIOR SECONDARY QUESTIONS

1. What is a Constitution?
2. Find out two rules covered by a Constitution of a group to which you belong e.g. your local football, netball, tennis, chess club.
3. Look at the extract of a copy of the "*Australian Constitution Act*" 1856 and find out the three branches of government. What are these branches? Find definitions for these branches.
4. Find out why it is more difficult to change the Federal Constitution of Australia than the South Australian Constitution. (Hint: The answer is partly in the extract of the copy of the "*Australian Constitution Act*" 1856.
5. What is meant by the term representative democracy?
6. How does living in a democracy affect your life?

RESEARCH

Select one of the events on the South Australian History Timeline and research the following about that event:

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THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

The Federal Government

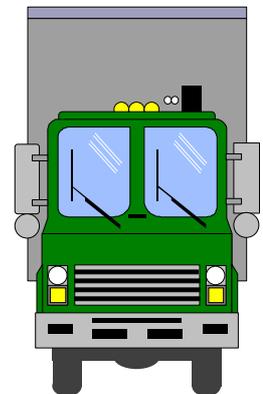
The Federal or Commonwealth Government is responsible for the conduct of national affairs. Its areas of responsibility are stated in the Australian Constitution s 51 and include:

- defence and foreign affairs
- taxation
- trade
- commerce and currency
- immigration
- postal services
- marriage and divorce
- telecommunications and broadcasting
- airports and air safety
- most social services and pensions etc.



The Federal Government is also greatly involved in many areas largely carried out by the States such as:

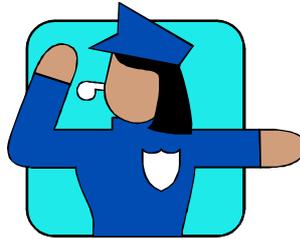
- health
- education
- arts
- environmental issues
- industrial relations
- transport and roads
- public works
- Aboriginal affairs etc.



State or Territory Government

Under the Australian Constitution, the States are responsible for everything not listed as a Federal responsibility. However, in many cases both levels are involved. Major State responsibilities include:

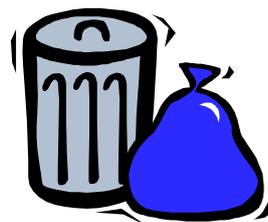
- health
- environment
- roads
- public transport
- public works
- agriculture and fishing
- industrial relations
- community services
- sport and recreation
- consumer affairs
- police
- prisons
- emergency services
- state courts



Local Government

The power of local government is controlled by Acts of State Parliament such as the Local Government Acts. Local Councils are concerned with matters close to our homes, such as:

- building regulations and development
- public health
- local roads and footpaths
- parks and sporting grounds
- libraries
- local environmental issues
- waste disposal
- many community services



BAND B QUESTIONS

- 1 Name the level of government in Australia which is responsible for the following:

Collecting your garbage
Collecting income tax
Funding your school
Providing transport such as buses
Building lighthouses to protect ships
Ensuring illegal drugs are not brought into Australia

- 2 In a group discuss why you think it is necessary to have more than one level of Government in Australia. (Hint: Remember these decisions were made when communication over large distances in Australia was difficult not like modern Australia today.)

- 3 **Investigation** – you may wish to consult parents, teachers, your local Member of Parliament (Federal and State) or your local Council to find out the following:

List three departments for each level of government i.e. Local, State and Federal.

- 4 **Investigation**

Find out who is your representative at Local, State and Federal Government level for your home address.

JUNIOR SECONDARY QUESTIONS

- 1 List three services provided by each of the three levels of Government in Australia.
- 2 Why do you think our ancestors settled on a system of Government in Australia Which involved three levels. (Hint: Think of our historical development and the lack of communication facilities available when Australia was first settled.)
- 3 Why do you think Australia decided to form a federation and become one nation rather than remaining as individual colonies?

SENIOR SECONDARY QUESTIONS

- 1 List three services provided by each of the three levels of Government in Australia.
- 2 Why do you think our ancestors settled on a system of Government in Australia which involved three levels. (Hint: Think of our historical development and the lack of communication facilities available when Australia was first settled.)
- 3 Find out who your representative is for your home address for each of the three levels of Government in Australia.
- 4 Why do you think our ancestors decided on federation and not to continue as individual colonies?
- 5 Throughout history some States of Australia have considered seceding from Australia and operating as a separate country. In groups discuss three possible advantages and three possible disadvantages of this possible action.