

# About Your State Parliament



## Levels of Government

There are three levels of government in Australia – Local, State and Federal.

**Federal:** The Federal level of government is responsible for issues set out in the Australian Constitution, such as tax, international relations (external affairs), defence, migration and more. The laws made at Federal level apply Australia-wide.

**State:** States are responsible for issues that are not set out in the Australian Constitution – things that were left to the states at the time of federation. States deal with big issues too, like education, health, emergency services, the environment and more.

**Local:** There are hundreds of local councils across Australia. Councils look after matters close to home, like community services, playgrounds, rubbish collection and building permits.

The Parliament of South Australia is at State level.



## Separation of Powers

In Australia, the powers to 1) make laws, 2) implement the law, and 3) make decisions about the law, are split up between different arms of government so that control doesn't rest with just one body.

**Parliament/Legislature:** The Parliament is the primary law maker. The elected representatives who work in the Parliament make laws for the people.

**Executive:** The Executive is the Ministers (sometimes called Cabinet) and the public service that work underneath the Ministers in different Government departments. The Executive implements the law, or, puts it into practice. For example, a teacher in a public school is putting into practice laws that have been made about a public education service. Another example of Executive work is the police, enforcing criminal laws that have been made by the Parliament.

**Judiciary:** The Judiciary is the system of courts. Courts have the primary responsibility to make decisions about the law, for example, deciding whether the law has been applied correctly, or whether it was made within the scope of its power.

The Parliament of South Australia is the Parliament/Legislature arm of government.



## South Australian Parliament

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A 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 Legislative Council. Following one of the world's first secret ballot elections, the first State Parliament met on Wednesday 22 April, 1857.

**The House of Assembly:** The House of Assembly is made up of 47 Members of Parliament (MPs). The 47 MPs have been elected to represent the South Australian people in the House for 4 years. An MP represents an electorate of approximately 25,000 voters. The political party who can form a majority of MPs in the House of Assembly becomes the Government of South Australia, and they get the ability to choose the Ministers who run the Executive. The Speaker keeps order, and the symbol of the House of Assembly is the Mace.

**The Legislative Council:** The Legislative Council is made up of 22 Members (MLCs). MLCs are elected by the people of South Australia for 8 year terms, and MLCs represent the whole state. This means all 22 MLCs work for you. The votes are counted differently for the Legislative Council, and there are often more minor parties or independents in this House of Parliament. The President keeps order, and the symbol of the Legislative Council is the Black Rod.

## The Functions of Parliament

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The Parliament has four main functions:

**Representation:** The Parliament is the place where South Australians are represented through their Members of Parliament. Members of Parliament can speak on Grievance Debates, Matters of Interest, and Motions to ensure the South Australian people are heard by the Government and by other Members.

**Scrutiny:** The Ministers responsible for the different Government departments also work in Parliament. This means that your representatives and different political parties can scrutinise and question their work. Members of Parliament can ask Ministers questions – both through Question Time (questions without notice) or through a questions “on notice” system.

**Financial:** The Parliament is the place where Government spending is approved. Every year the budget must be passed. It is usually introduced in June for the upcoming financial year.

**Legislative:** The Parliament is the place where South Australian laws are made and changed.

## The Building

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The classical building has marble columns, Corinthian capitals and keystone carvings of 19th century Governors, Presidents and Speakers. The main building materials used were marble from Kapunda and granite from Victor Harbor. The colours of the Chambers follow the British tradition of red for the Legislative Council and green for the House of Assembly. The House of Assembly was opened on 5 June, 1889. In 1936, Sir Langdon Bonython made a gift of £100,000 to enable work to be started on the Legislative Council which opened on 5 June, 1939. Two Premiers, Tom Price (1905-1909) and Frank Walsh (1965-1967), both worked as stonemasons on the site.

## Getting Involved

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**Visiting:** Parliament House is on the corner of King William Street and North Terrace. The sittings of both Houses are open to members of the public and visitors are welcome. When Parliament is not sitting guided tours are available at 10:00am and 2:00pm weekdays. All visits are free. School and group tours should be booked through your Local Member of Parliament. If you cannot watch Parliament in person, you can watch a live broadcast online.

**Hansard:** Hansard is the official report of the debates of the Parliament. You can read all of the proceedings of Parliament in Hansard. Hansard is available on the Parliament's website.

**Committees:** Small groups of Members are formed into committees to undertake detailed work on behalf of the Houses. Parliamentary Committees have extensive powers to take evidence and consider and report on

matters within their terms of reference. The public can interact with committees by making submissions and appearing at public hearings.

**Petitions:** A petition is a request for action. Any citizen, or group of citizens of South Australia, may petition either House of Parliament to take action. As an example, the petition may request a House to introduce legislation, or to repeal or amend existing legislation, or take action for a particular purpose or in favour of particular persons. Petitioning Parliament is a long established fundamental right of all citizens. It allows any individual or group to place grievances before the Parliament. It is one of the few direct means of communication between the people and the Parliament.

**Demonstrations:** Rallies or demonstrations on the steps of Parliament House are permitted but it is important that the organisers seek approval of the Speaker and President. This is in the interests of members of the public attending the Parliament or using the footpath and road and of those participating in the rally or demonstration.

**Contacting Members:** You can look up Member contact information on our website to speak to your representatives about your views on issues.

### Comparison with the Federal Parliament

	Federal Parliament	
	House of Representatives	Senate
Other Names	Lower House	Upper House
Members	151	76
Representation	Each MP represents an electorate of 110,000 voters	Each Senator represents their state or territory. There are 12 Senators for each state, and 2 for each territory.
Term	3 years	6 years
Voting System	Preferential	Proportional – single transferable vote
Jurisdiction	Laws passed are for the whole of Australia	Laws passed are for the whole of Australia

	Parliament of South Australia	
	House of Assembly	Legislative Council
Other Names	Lower House	Upper House
Members	47	22
Representation	Each MP represents an electorate of 25,000 voters	Each MLC represents the whole of South Australia
Term	4 years	8 years
Voting System	Preferential	Proportional – optional preferential
Jurisdiction	Laws passed are for South Australia only	Laws passed are for South Australia only

## Contact Us

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