

The Role of Government in Australia

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How does it all work?



An educational resource from your local Federal Member of Parliament

Andrew Robb MP

Federal Member for Goldstein

Three levels of Government

There are three levels of Government in Australia:

- Local
- State
- Federal

Our current system of Government was established in 1901 when the States (then separate colonies) joined together to form the Australian Federation. The powers and role of each level of Government were established by the Constitution (a set of rules for governing Australia) and have been developed over the years. While there are some areas where responsibilities overlap, generally Local, State and Federal Governments make rules about different things.

These rules (laws) cover most aspects of our daily lives, from when our rubbish bins are collected, what you are taught at school, where traffic lights are located, to how much you pay for a postage stamp – all of these decisions have been made by Governments. All three levels of Government provide different services in the community and they raise the money to pay for these services through taxes and charges.

Australians vote for representatives to Local, State and Federal Governments in separate elections. Everyone in Australia has someone to represent them at each level of Government. The three levels of Government work together so that every Australian shares the services they each provide.

Australia's system of Government is based on the British Westminster system which is one of the oldest and most stable democracies in the world. Australia's system of Government is part of what makes our country such a fantastic place.

Federal Government

The Federal Parliament is located in our national capital, Canberra.

The Federal Parliament makes laws for all Australians – these laws are called Acts of Parliament.

There are two “houses” of Parliament:

- House of Representatives
- Senate

The House of Representatives is made up of 150 elected representatives known as Members from regions called “electorates” across Australia. Each Member represents approximately 92,000 voters.

The Senate is made up of 76 Senators – 12 from each of the States and 2 from each Territory.

The Government is formed by the political party with the majority of Members elected to the House of Representatives. The elected leader of that party is the Prime Minister and leads the Australian Government.

The Constitution gives the Federal Parliament greater powers than State Governments or Local Councils.



Responsible for:

- Medicare
- Immigration and Customs
- Employment and Workplace Relations
- Australia Post
- Family Support and Pensions
- Centrelink
- Funding to the States and Territories
- Taxation - Income Tax, GST and Company Taxes
- Control of Television and Radio
- Imports and Exports
- Air Safety
- Passports
- Defence
- Broadband

federal

State Government

2

Each State or Territory has its own Parliament and Government. The State Parliament makes laws for everyone within that State.

The leader of a State Government is called the Premier. The leader of a Territory Government is called the Chief Minister.

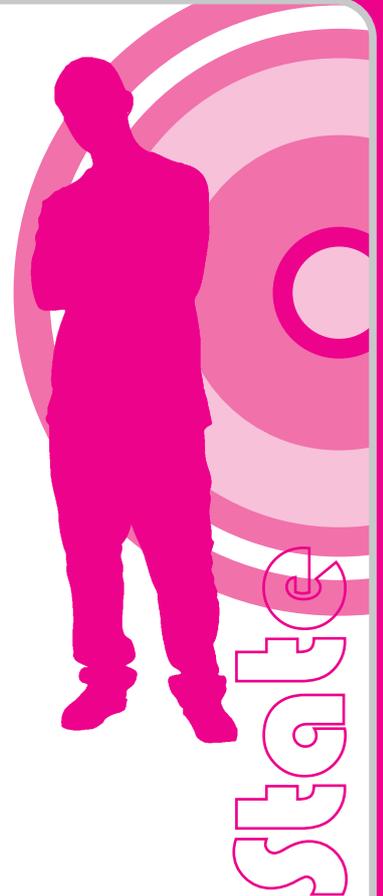
Not every State or Territory Government operates under the same system. Some have an upper house and a lower house, others have only one house. The number of members of parliament also varies significantly from State to State.

The State Government is responsible for schools, police, prisons, most roads, railways and emergency services such as fire and ambulance. States raise their own money through taxes and also receive money directly from the Federal Government.

The State Premiers and Territory Chief Ministers meet regularly in Canberra with the Prime Minister and Treasurer to discuss the amount of money they will receive to help pay for their services. The meeting is called the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

Responsible for:

- Schools
- Railways
- Car Registration
- Fire Brigade
- Wildlife Protection
- Hospitals
- Most Roads
- Police
- Ambulance
- Prisons
- Planning



Local Government

3

Local Government is often referred to as the Local Council or Shire. Councils make decisions on local town matters. They also make laws (by-laws) that cover a wide range of everyday services – like rubbish collection, sewerage and footpaths.

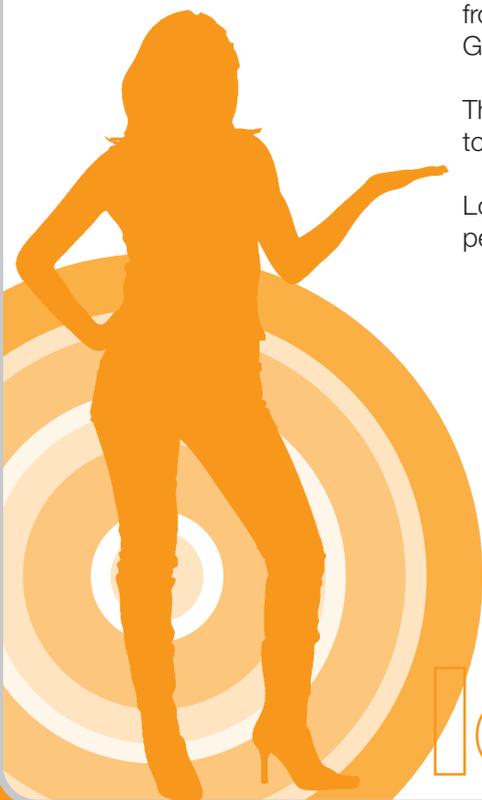
Local Councils raise the money to provide these services by collecting taxes (rates) from all local homeowners. Local Councils also receive money from Federal and State Government grants to help them operate.

There are hundreds of local Governments throughout Australia. Councillors are elected to represent local residents and the Mayor is elected by the Councillors.

Local Governments plan how our local area will develop. They control building permissions and administer local parks, sporting fields and community centres.

Responsible for:

- Street Signs
- Sports Grounds
- Rubbish Collections
- Building Permits
- Collecting Rates
- Traffic Control
- Animal Control
- Drains and Footpaths
- Swimming Pools



Local

Australia's Constitution

A Constitution is a set of rules for governing a country.

Australia's Constitution was created at Federation in 1901. It was written by representatives of each of the States (then colonies) at several meetings prior to 1901.

The Constitution has special status – *it cannot be changed in the same way as other laws*. It can only be changed by a direct vote of all Australians. This is called a referendum.

The Federal Parliament can change ordinary laws by passing new ones but it can only suggest changes to the Constitution. Since 1901, the Federal Parliament has made 44 different proposals to change the Constitution – but only 8 have been passed by referendum.

A special Constitutional Convention was held in February 1998 to consider whether or not Australia should become a Republic and have an elected head of State rather than the Queen. The referendum, held in November 1999, rejected the Republic Model.



House of Representatives

The Role of a Federal Member of Parliament

Your local Federal Member of Parliament is Andrew Robb.

Andrew represents residents who live in the Federal seat of Goldstein.

While there is no set job description for a local Member, they have many roles in the electorate and must also attend Parliamentary sittings in Canberra approximately 20 weeks a year.

At all times the local Member is a spokesperson for local residents – to make the Government aware of local requirements and to fight for funding of local projects.

Andrew works with local residents, community groups and small business owners to help solve local problems. Andrew also attends many community functions, such as Australia Day ceremonies and ANZAC Day services as well as representing the Government at the launch of new projects.

When in Canberra for Parliamentary sittings, Andrew makes speeches on proposed laws and other issues of concern to local residents.

Andrew Robb is also Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction.



Andrew Robb in Goldstein

How laws are Made...

A law is a rule made by a parliament.

A bill is a proposal for a new or altered law that is put before a Parliament. Every year the Parliament of Australia considers and passes between 150 and 220 bills.

A bill becomes an Act of Parliament after it has been passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and then signed by the Governor-General (also called Royal Assent).

The Parliament can change, amend or even delete (repeal) an Act of Parliament.

Parliament turns a bill into a law or Act of Parliament by voting the bill through the listed stages on the right >>>>



The Senate



Andrew Robb MP speaking in Parliament

House of Representatives

First reading.

The bill is introduced.



Second reading speeches.

Minister explains the bill and members give their opinion.



Consideration in detail.

Members discuss each part of the bill in detail and vote on each amendment.



Third reading.

Members vote on the current version of the bill.
Bill is passed and sent to the Senate.

Senate

First reading.

The bill is introduced.



Second reading speeches.

Senators give their opinions.
Vote taken.



Committee of the whole.

Senators discuss each part of the bill in detail and vote on each amendment.



Third reading.

Senators vote on the finished version of the bill.
Amended bills are returned to the House.



The House of Representatives votes on all the Senate amendments.

The bill is passed if the two Houses agree on all the amendments in the final version.



The Governor-General signs the bill.

This is called a royal assent.
The bill is now law.



The Australian Coat of Arms

The Australian Coat of Arms consists of a shield with the badges of each of the six Australian States. On the left side of the shield stands a red kangaroo and on the right is an emu. Beneath the shield is a scroll with the word 'Australia' written in it. Wattle sprays form a background.

The Coat of Arms is one of the symbols of Federation. The Commonwealth uses it to identify its authority and property. However, it can also be found in many other places, for example on cricketers' caps and on Australian passports.

Need More Information?

To find out more information about how the Parliament works and what Members of Parliament do, please check out:

Parliamentary Education Office

www.peo.gov.au



Parliamentary Education Office

Kids View - Parliament In Focus

www.peo.gov.au/kidsview



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