

Party Whips

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The term 'whip' originated in the Parliament of the United Kingdom and is derived from an English fox-hunting term 'whipper-in'. This was the person who kept the hounds in order and controlled their straying from the pack. In Parliament a whip is a member of a political party whose task is to ensure that members of the party attend the chamber and support their party when a vote is taken. The whips, as tellers, also count the members who vote in a division and give the numbers to the President or Speaker. Historically, whips have been responsible for arranging the order of speakers in the house, but in modern Parliaments, this task is often shared by the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business in each house. Liaison with the party leaders is also necessary.

The party whip has close ties with the respective party leader and is responsible for maintaining party discipline, which is exercised in several forms including suspension from party meetings or denial of responsibilities.

Whips are responsible for arranging 'pairs', a system that allows a member to be absent from the chamber at the same time as a member from the opposite side of the house. This means that the anticipated result of a division will not be disturbed. Although 'pairs' are not officially recognised parliamentary procedure, they are published in Hansard.

The tasks of the whips and deputy whips are time-consuming, but are necessary for the efficient running of party and parliamentary affairs. They are addressed as the 'Government Whip' and the 'Opposition Whip'. The Salaries and Allowances Tribunal provides specific remuneration for the respective whips, but the allowance differs for the Legislative Council and the numerically greater Legislative Assembly.



The Leader of the House

The role of the whips in modern Parliaments is conducted in consultation with the Leader of the House.

The appointment of the Leader of the House is made by the Premier, who has the ultimate authority and responsibility for government business.

An important function of the Leader of the House is to undertake or oversee negotiations, often resulting in the trading of parliamentary time with their opposition counterpart, the Manager of Opposition Business, on matters relating to the programming of the house.

In the House of Representatives¹ the post of Leader of the House dates back to 1951. In Western Australia, the Leader of the House in the Legislative Assembly was not instituted until 1983, when the role was assigned to a minister who was also in charge of other portfolios. Parliament House



1 The lower house of the Federal Parliament.

