

# About Parliament 13

## Members of Parliament

### Who is eligible to be a Member of Parliament?

To be a member of the Western Australian Parliament, a person must be an Australian citizen over the age of 18 and be eligible to vote in this State. This means that the person must be a Western Australian resident.

A member of Parliament must not be an undischarged bankrupt, must not hold an office under the Crown (a government position or pension), and must not have been convicted of a crime for which the penalty is imprisonment for five years or more.

The *Constitution Act 1889* also forbids a person from simultaneously being a member of any other Parliament. A person cannot be a member of both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council at the same time.



Parliament House

### 'Backbencher' or Private Member

Members of Parliament who are not members of the Cabinet or Ministry or members of the Shadow Cabinet or Shadow Ministry are often referred to as Private Members or 'backbenchers'.

This name derives from the British parliamentary convention that stipulates ministers and shadow ministers occupy the front seats of the Chamber.

Ministers occupy the front seats to the right of the Presiding Officers<sup>1</sup> and shadow ministers occupy the front seats to the left of the Presiding Officers.

The remaining members of each Chamber occupy the 'backbenches'.

<sup>1</sup> The President of the Legislative Council or the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

### How are Members of Parliament elected?

Members of the Western Australian Parliament are elected by the people eligible to vote in Western Australia. Voting is conducted by secret ballot and is compulsory for all citizens aged 18 and over.

Candidates from a district of the Legislative Assembly or region of the Legislative Council are elected according to the voting system for each House. Members then represent all persons in their district or region.

### Where do Members sit in Parliament?

The Western Australian Parliament's Legislative Assembly (Lower House) is divided into 59 electoral districts and the voters in each district elect one member to the Assembly. Members of the Legislative Assembly hold their seats for a maximum of four years.



Legislative Assembly Chamber

Legislative Council (Upper House) members are drawn from six regions. Six members are elected to represent each region. Members of the Legislative Council hold their seats for a fixed term of four years (commencing on 22 May following a General Election).



Legislative Council Chamber

## What do Members of Parliament do?

The discussion over what roles members should fulfil has occupied the minds of several great political thinkers such as Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill.

Today the subject is still widely debated, but three very important roles are often identified:

### 1. Members are law-makers

Members sit in Parliament, where they take part in debates and pass, amend or defeat laws for all Western Australians. Members also serve on parliamentary committees that closely examine all types of issues. Committee recommendations can often influence legislation introduced into Parliament.

### 2. Members represent their constituents

Members of Parliament seek to address the concerns, issues, questions, and ideas of the people they represent (their constituents).

This sometimes requires members to ask questions of ministers in Parliament or contact public servants to raise specific issues about constituent concerns. Often they need to direct people to the most appropriate department or agency to deal with their problems.

### 3. Most members represent a political party

Most members of Parliament belong to a political party and contribute to the views and policies of that party.

The manner in which a member undertakes their role may vary according to a number of conditions:

- whether the member is a minister or shadow minister;
- whether the member belongs to the Government or Opposition party;
- whether the member is from a major party, a minor party, or is an Independent;
- whether the member sits in the Legislative Assembly or the Legislative Council;

- whether the member represents a metropolitan or non-metropolitan electorate or region; and
- whether the member is on a parliamentary committee.

## Salaries and Allowances

Payment of members of the Western Australian Parliament (apart from ministers) did not begin until 1900. However, the appropriate level of payment has always been keenly debated.

Since 1975 a Salaries and Allowances Tribunal annually determines the remuneration of members of Parliament. Recent surveys by the Tribunal have indicated that members usually work long hours, often in excess of 70 hours per week.

In addition to a salary, allowances are also made for matters such as electorate offices, motor vehicles, travelling, accommodation and some expenses of members on parliamentary business.



Parliament House

## Contact Your Local Member

Any member of the public is welcome to contact their member of Parliament, either at the Member's electorate office or at Parliament House when the Houses are sitting.

Contact numbers can be accessed on the Parliament's website (under the individual members' names) at [www.parliament.wa.gov.au](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au) or by contacting Parliament House on (08) 9222 7222.