

About Parliament 24

Hansard and the Records of the House

If you would like to know what is said during parliamentary debates, refer to *Hansard*. If you would like to know the official record of decisions and votes made in one of the Houses of Parliament, refer to the *Votes and Proceedings* of the Legislative Assembly or the *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Legislative Council.

Hansard, *Votes and Proceedings*, and *Minutes* are available from the Western Australian Parliament's website: www.parliament.wa.gov.au. On sitting days a live broadcast of the proceedings of each House is also available.



Legislative Council Chamber

Hansard

Hansard is the name by which the official printed record of parliamentary debates is usually known.

History

The publication is named after the Hansard family who first printed, and then took responsibility for producing reports of the parliamentary debates in the House of Commons¹ in the nineteenth century.

Since 1890, *Hansard* reporters have been providing clear and independent reports of the debates of the Parliament of Western Australia.

Role

Hansard reporters, who are highly trained, take ten minute turns to record the debates and proceedings of Parliament, using machine shorthand, written shorthand, or audio.

Most *Hansard* reporters now use a stenograph machine. The data from a stenograph machine can be extracted and inserted into a computer, which translates it into English.

The principal function of *Hansard* reporters is to prepare edited transcripts of parliamentary debates. In addition, the department provides transcripts of evidence given before parliamentary committees and sometimes of Ministerial Conferences and Royal Commissions.



Legislative Assembly Chamber

Hansard is not a verbatim transcript; rather, it is a full report in the first person in which the member's words are used. However, obvious mistakes are corrected and redundancies and needless repetition are removed. Clarity is provided, while ambiguity and elegant variation are avoided.

Nothing is added to or omitted from the transcript which alters the meaning of the speech.

Members are provided with copies of their speeches progressively throughout the day's sitting, to enable them to check the accuracy of the report.

A daily proof document is produced by 9.00am the following day. After further proofreading and editing, the weekly *Hansard* is published on the following Tuesday.

¹ The Lower House of the British Parliament.

The bound volumes are printed after the session has ended, and they are the official and permanent records of parliamentary debates. A cumulative index to the whole session is published in a bound volume.

Under the *Parliamentary Papers Act 1891*, persons involved in publishing the *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, are protected by parliamentary privilege; that is, they are immune from civil liability for any defamation contained within the debates.

Article 9 of the *Bill of Rights 1689* also prevents courts and other places from questioning the proceedings of Parliament. However, the debates may be referred to by a court to assist in interpreting the meaning of an Act of Parliament.

Votes and Proceedings (Legislative Assembly) and Minutes (Legislative Council)

The *Votes and Proceedings* of the Legislative Assembly and the *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Legislative Council are the official record of proceedings, and do not include text of debate which is recorded in *Hansard*. These documents record all votes, including those taken on the voices and by division. Votes taken by division show which way each individual member voted.

Messages

Messages are a means of written formal communication between the two Houses. Messages may deal with the transmission of bills between the two Houses, requests for the attendance of members or officers of the other House as witnesses, appointment of joint standing or select committees, requests for conferences and transmission of resolutions for concurrence.

Once it is signed by the Presiding Officer, the Sergeant-at-Arms or the Usher of the Black Rod delivers it over the Bar of the recipient House.

Notice Paper

A Notice Paper (agenda of business for the House) is issued by each House every sitting day, except the first day of a session when there is no business before either House. Business is listed in the order determined by the Standing Orders (see below) of each House.

The Leader of the House in the Legislative Assembly and the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council normally determine the order of Government business for the Notice Paper of their respective Houses.

However, the House may decide to vary the order of business listed on the Notice Paper. Usually there is far more business listed on each day's Notice Paper than can be debated on that sitting day. Business not dealt with is automatically listed on the Notice Paper for the next sitting day.

If it is desired to pursue business that remains on the Notice Paper when Parliament is prorogued, that business must be reintroduced or reinstated in the next session - it does not automatically carry over into the new session.

Business Program

Because there is more listed on the Notice Paper than can be dealt with on any day, a daily 'Business Program' is issued. This lists the items the House seeks to deal with that day.

Standing Orders

Standing Orders are the formal rules set down by each House for its operation, and determine how debates and business are conducted. Any variation to these rules must have the support of an absolute majority of members in that House. The Clerk of the House is the principal advisor to the Presiding Officer and members regarding the Standing Orders, procedures and privileges.

Tabled Papers

A document presented to Parliament is laid on the Table of the House and is called a Tabled Paper. These papers are public documents and are available to members of Parliament, the media and the public.

Examples of papers are annual reports of Government agencies, subordinate legislation (such as regulations, rules, local laws and by-laws), and documents relating to government activities, the Parliament, the Auditor General and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).