GETTING INVOLVED IN PARLIAMENT

The Australian Parliament represents the people and makes laws and important decisions on their behalf. The Parliament is interested in the opinions of Australians, who have a right to be involved in this decision-making. There are many ways that individuals and organisations can have their say about the actions and decisions of the Parliament.

Voting

At least every three years, Australians vote to elect people to represent them in the Parliament. This is the most direct way that Australians are involved in their Parliament. If the people of Australia do not like the actions of a government, they have a chance to elect new representatives in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

Australians can enrol to vote once they turn 16, although they can’t vote until they turn 18. With the right to vote comes the responsibility to make an informed decision. You can do that by learning about Parliament and taking an interest in candidates, including your current representatives in Parliament. You can analyse their decisions and policies and decide if they are doing what you want.

For more information, go to Federal Elections.

Contact members of parliament

Australians can write to or email members of parliament at any time. You can contact your federal member or senators about things that are important to you. Alternatively, if you have a view about a particular subject (such as health, education or the environment) you can contact the government minister responsible for that area. Postal addresses, phone numbers and email addresses of all members of parliament are available on the Parliament House website.

For more information, go to: www.tinyurl.com/APH-Contacts

Petitions

Members of the public can raise matters of importance to them and influence decisions made in Parliament by starting or signing a petition. This is a request by a group of citizens for Parliament to take note of and perhaps solve a particular problem. It is the oldest way that individuals or groups can ask the Parliament to take action on an issue. The petition contains a list of signatures of people who support that request. It is then formally presented to the Parliament and entered into the parliamentary records.

For more information, go to Petitions.
 Committees

Parliamentary committees are another way that Australians can directly involve themselves in the decisions of the Parliament. A committee is usually made up of six to ten members of parliament who investigate a matter that the Parliament considers important. This may be the subject of a bill (proposed law) or a particular issue. Parliamentary committees investigate community attitudes by inviting the public, organisations and experts to give their opinion on the bill or issue.

Any member of the public can write to the committee to express their views and provide information which may be helpful to the committee. After considering these written submissions, the committee may choose to hear further from members of the public, asking them to expand on the information they have already given. The committee will then write a report which will be presented to the Parliament. The report may recommend that the government take some course of action based on their findings.

For more information, go to Parliamentary Committees.

Public meetings and protests

Australians who are concerned about an issue can organise a public meeting or protest about that issue. They may invite members of parliament to attend their public meetings to hear what the people have to say, or answer questions from the public. Media coverage of these meetings and protests may then put pressure on the Parliament to act on the issue. People can also express their opinion by participating in online forums and discussions, writing a letter to the newspaper or calling up talk-back radio.

Observing Parliament

As well as these direct means for Australians to engage in Parliament, there are many ways for the public to observe and keep up to date with the Parliament. The work of the House of Representatives and the Senate is always open for the public to watch, as is much of the work of parliamentary committees. You can watch Parliament in action on television or via the internet at www.aph.gov.au. The press gallery in Parliament House report on the work of the Parliament through print and broadcast media. Many members of parliament also use social media to directly communicate to the public about their work.

For more information, go to Records of the Parliament.