



# Australia's Federal Government



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### Word watch

Look out for the 'Word watch' feature, which explains the meanings of words shown in **bold**.



# Democracy in Australia

You might have heard someone say, ‘Aren’t we lucky to live in a democratic country?’ Living in a **democracy** means we are free to speak our mind and have a say in who governs us. We can all aspire to be the leader of our country.

## What is democracy?

Good question! Basically, democracy is a form of government in which the people of a country have an equal say in who governs them. American President Abraham Lincoln came up with possibly the best and simplest definition of democracy. In 1863, he said that democracy was ‘Government of the people, by the people, for the people.’

## Has Australia always been a democracy?

Australia has not always been a democracy. In the years following European settlement, the governor of the **colony** of New South Wales issued orders and everyone had to obey them. In fact, even when the first **federal** parliament was elected, many women were not allowed to vote. However, today, everyone over the age of 18 has the right to vote for their local, state and federal governments.



▲ In Australia, during elections everyone’s vote is equal, whether they are rich or poor, male or female, employed or unemployed.

## Are all countries democracies?

Not all countries are democracies. There are other forms of government, such as:

- ✱ dictatorship: government by people who have seized power by force and who use force (or the fear of force) to maintain power
- ✱ monarchy: government by a single ruler (such as a king or queen), often from a particular family
- ✱ oligarchy: government by a few people (such as members of one family or a few military leaders)
- ✱ theocracy: government by religious leaders who enforce the law of God.

## Features of a democracy:

- the right to vote
- every vote is of equal value
- the fate of the government is in the hands of the people
- a constitution that outlines how the country is to be governed
- freedom of thought
- freedom of religion.



## In this book ...

... you can discover how the federal level of government began, read about its powers, and learn about lobbyists and how they try to influence political decision-making today, and more.

▲ Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe, has ruled his nation as a dictator, stamping out opposition and either rigging elections or ignoring election results that did not go his way.



*I have known little communities in the Australian bush, which ... realised for me much, so much, of what I desired in a democracy.*

Francis Adams, English writer, 1893



## Word watch

**colony** a land governed by another country  
**democracy** the word comes from two Greek words: *demos* meaning people and *kratos* meaning power. So together they mean ‘power to the people’.  
**federal** national



# A timeline of the federal government

This timeline provides a snapshot of major events in the history of Australia's federal government.

► Use the page references to find more information about that event on the timeline.

**compulsory** required, whether a person wants to or not

Date	Event	Date	Event	Date	Event	Date	Event
1840							
1850	1846 Governor of New South Wales, Sir Charles FitzRoy, writes to British authorities suggesting they appoint a person or body to make sure that <b>legislation</b> from the colonies is in the national interest. ► page 8	1903	Women stand for federal parliament for the first time.	1915		1950	1949 The Liberal Party forms federal government.
1860		1904	The Labor Party forms federal government for the first time.		1916 The Nationalist Party forms federal government.	1960	
1870	1869–90s Conferences are held among the colonies to discuss how to form a <b>federation</b> . ► page 8	1904	The Free Trade Party forms federal government.			1970	
1880		1905	1905 The Protectionist Party forms federal government.	1920			1972 The Labor Party forms federal government.
1890	1898 The first <b>referendum</b> held to see if Australian people wanted a federation was not successful. ► page 9				1924 Voting becomes <b>compulsory</b> for federal elections.	1975	1975 Prime Minister Gough Whitlam is dismissed by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr.
	1899 The second referendum held to see if Australian people wanted a federation was successful. ► page 9	1908	The Labor Party forms federal government.	1925			1975 The Liberal Party forms federal government.
1900		1909	The Protectionist Party forms federal government.		1927 Parliament House in Canberra is opened.	1980	
	1901 Federation occurs with a federal government and six State governments. ► page 8	1910	1910 The Labor Party forms federal government.	1930			1983 The Labor Party forms federal government.
	1901 Protectionist Party forms first federal government; Edmund Barton becomes first Prime Minister.	1913	The Liberal Party (not the same as the modern Liberal Party) forms federal government.	1935		1990	
		1914	The Labor Party forms federal government.		1932 The United Australia Party forms federal government.		1996 The Liberal Party forms federal government.
				1940	1941 The Labor Party forms federal government.	2000	
				1945	1943 Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney become the first women elected to the federal parliament.		2007 The Labor Party forms federal government.
						2010	2010 The Labor Party forms federal government with the support of independents. ► page 24



◀ Edmund Barton, the first Prime Minister of Australia

**Word watch**

**federation** a system of government with a national government and several state governments

**legislation** laws

**referendum** a vote to adopt or change a constitution

**Word watch**

**compulsory** required, whether a person wants to or not



# How did Australia become a federation?

Australia's federal government began when Australia became a **federation** on 1 January 1901. However, it did not happen quickly. The first moves towards a federation began more than 50 years earlier.

## Uniting the colonies

On 29 September 1846, the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Charles FitzRoy, wrote to British authorities suggesting they appoint 'some superior functionary' (a top official) to make sure that **legislation** by the individual colonies was in the interests of all the colonies. This was the first record of an official in Australia questioning whether having a number of independent colonies was in the interest of the nation as a whole.

## The federation debate

From the 1860s to the 1890s, there was a great deal of debate about how Australia should be governed. Several **intercolonial** conferences were held to discuss if a federation was necessary, what form a federation would take and what to include in an Australian **Constitution**. It was difficult for the colonies to agree, because what was best for one was not necessarily in the interests of another. Finally, at a conference in 1893, it was agreed to begin writing an Australian constitution.



▲ Representatives from each of the colonies attended the Intercolonial Conference held in Sydney in 1881.

### Tweet of the week

@smediafan: If we had social media back then, people could just have tweeted or blogged their views about federation.

### Word watch

**constitution** a document that outlines how a nation is to be governed  
**federation** a system of government with a national government and several state governments  
**intercolonial** involving some or all of the colonies  
**legislation** laws

## Did the Australian people want a federation?

In 1898, a **referendum** was held to make sure the Australian people wanted a federation. Western Australia and Queensland did not take part.

### 1898 referendum result

Colony	Yes	No	Majority in favour
New South Wales	71 595	66 228	5 367
Victoria	100 520	22 099	78 421
South Australia	35 800	17 320	18 480
Tasmania	11 797	2 716	9 081
<b>Total</b>	<b>219 712</b>	<b>108 363</b>	<b>111 349</b>

Although all the states that took part voted in favour of a federation at the 1898 referendum, New South Wales required 80 000 votes in favour before the proposal could pass. So, another referendum was held the following year. This time Queensland participated.

### 1899 referendum result

Colony	Yes	No	Majority in favour
New South Wales	107 420	82 741	24 679
Victoria	152 653	9 805	142 848
Queensland	38 488	30 996	7 492
South Australia	65 990	17 053	48 937
Tasmania	13 437	791	12 646
<b>Total</b>	<b>377 988</b>	<b>141 386</b>	<b>236 602</b>

The large 'yes' vote from all the participating states prompted Western Australia to hold a referendum the following year, and when they also voted 'yes' there was nothing to stop federation going ahead.

This cartoon from 1898 illustrates New South Wales Premier George Reid, who kept changing his mind about the issue of federation.

### Major figures

Among the major figures involved in the federation **debate** and the writing of the Australian Constitution were:

**Edmund Barton**  
First Prime Minister of Australia

**Alfred Deakin**  
Prime Minister of Australia on three occasions

**Samuel Griffith**  
Premier of Queensland on two occasions

**Henry Parkes**  
Premier of New South Wales on five occasions

**Thomas Playford**  
Premier of South Australia on two occasions



### Word watch

**debate** argument  
**referendum** a vote to adopt or change a constitution  
**majority** more than half



# What is the federal parliament responsible for?

The Australian **Constitution** sets out what the federal parliament is responsible for. The other areas come under the control of the state parliaments. However, there are ways that the federal parliament can take control of state responsibilities. One way is by convincing the **High Court of Australia** that the area of responsibility has to do with Australia's relationships with other countries.

## Part V, Section 51 of the Australian Constitution

The federal parliament's areas of responsibility are set out in Part V, Section 51 of the Australian Constitution. Here are parts of that section:

### PART V – POWERS OF THE PARLIAMENT

51. The [Federal] Parliament shall ... have power to make laws .... with respect to:

- Trade and commerce with other countries, and among the States:
- Taxation; but so as not to **discriminate** between States or parts of States:
- Postal, telegraphic, telephonic, and other like services:
- The naval and military defence of the Commonwealth and of the several States, and the control of the forces to execute and maintain the laws of the Commonwealth:
- Lighthouses, lightships, beacons and buoys:

▼ The federal parliament is responsible for the defence of Australia.



### Word watch

**constitution** a document that outlines how a nation is to be governed  
**discriminate** favour one over another  
**High Court of Australia** the highest court in the land – it hears matters to do with the Australian Constitution

- **Quarantine:**
- Currency, coinage, and legal tender:
- Banking, other than State banking ... and the issue of paper money:
- Insurance, other than State insurance:
- Copyrights, patents of inventions and designs, and trademarks:
- **Naturalisation** and **aliens**:
- Foreign corporations, and:
- Marriage ... [and] divorce:
- Invalid and old-age pensions:
- **Maternity allowances**, widows' pensions, child endowment ... unemployment ... sickness and hospital benefits:
- **Immigration** and **emigration**:
- External Affairs:
- The relations of the Commonwealth with the islands of the Pacific:
- The control of railways with respect to transport for the naval and military purposes of the Commonwealth:
- Railway construction and extension in any State with the consent of that State:
- ... the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes extending beyond the limits of any one State:



▲ Australia's relationships with other countries, such as the United States, are handled by federal parliament. In November 2010, Prime Minister Julia Gillard met with US President Barack Obama.

### Shared responsibilities

Some areas are shared by the federal and state parliaments, such as the arts, Indigenous affairs, health and tourism. The parliaments agree which areas to cover, or the federal parliament provides **funds** for the state parliament to deliver services.

### Word watch

**aliens** people from another country  
**emigration** permanently moving out of one country to another country  
**funds** an amount of money to be used for a specific purpose  
**immigration** permanently moving into one country from another country  
**maternity allowances** payments to mothers to help with the cost of raising children  
**naturalisation** becoming a citizen of a country  
**quarantine** isolating food, plants, animals or people for a period of time to stop the spread of disease



# How does the federal government raise money?

The federal government has to raise a lot of money to pay for all the services it delivers – more than \$300 billion a year. The government raises most of its money by collecting **taxes**. Paying taxes is **compulsory**. There are many different taxes but they fall into two types: direct taxes and indirect taxes.

## Taxes vs levies

Sometimes governments introduce levies, which are similar to taxes but raise money for a particular purpose for a short time.

## Direct taxes

Direct taxes are paid directly from a person or a company to the government. An example is income tax. Income tax is a tax on the amount of money that people earn when they work. Another type of direct tax is company tax. Company tax is similar to income tax – it is a tax on the amount of money that a company earns. The more a person or a company earns, the more tax they pay.

## Indirect taxes

Indirect taxes are extra costs that governments add to the price of a **good** or a service. This extra cost is passed on to the government by the person or business selling the good or service. Unlike direct taxes, everybody pays the same amount of tax on a good or service, no matter how rich or poor they are. The goods and services tax (GST) is an indirect tax. People pay an extra 10 per cent for most goods and services that they buy. The federal government receives the 10 per cent and passes it on to the states and territories to help pay for state and territory services.

◀ The GST on packaged food goes to the federal government, who passes it on to the states and territories.



## Word watch

**compulsory** required to do something, whether a person wants to or not  
**good** product  
**taxes** fees charged by a government on a product, income or activity

## What is the Budget?

The person responsible for the federal government's finances is the Federal Treasurer. The Treasurer works out where the government's money is to be spent, and where the funds will come from. They often have to make unpopular decisions, such as cutting spending or raising taxes. The Treasurer's plans are delivered to parliament each year in a document called the Budget. It contains details of how much the government expects to raise in **funds** over the following 12 months, as well as how it plans to spend this money.

This is the start of Treasurer Wayne Swan's Budget speech to federal parliament on 11 May 2010:

## Budget speech 2010

Mr Speaker, of Australia's 18 years of continuous economic expansion, Australians can be proudest of the one just passed. Not just because together we avoided recession when almost all other advanced economies did not.

Not just because together we created 225 000 jobs when many other advanced economies were shedding hundreds of thousands of jobs.

But because our shared successes put us in a position of strength from which we will build growth and opportunity, and secure the future.

A position of strength from which we will build a modern tax and retirement incomes system, invest in **renewable** energy, and deliver historic health and hospital **reform**.

A position of strength from which we will build the skills base and capital stock we need for a new generation of prosperity.

Tonight we meet the highest standards of responsible economic management.



▲ Treasurer Wayne Swan delivering the 2010 Budget speech to federal parliament.

## Tweet of the week

@budgetboy: It's a bit like pocket money. You can't spend more than you have – unless you borrow.

## VIP

The Treasurer is considered to have the second most important job in the federal government, after the Prime Minister.

## Word watch

**funds** an amount of money to be used for a specific purpose  
**reform** improve by making changes  
**renewable** lasts forever



# What are the lower and upper houses?

There are two houses in the federal parliament: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives is also known as the 'lower house', while the Senate is also known as the 'upper house'.

## The House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is the house where government is formed. The political party that has the most members in the House of Representatives becomes the government of the country. The House of Representatives is also the part of parliament where **legislation** is introduced. For a law to be passed, a **majority** of members in the lower house have to support it. If a majority votes against the law, it cannot be passed.

The House of Representatives has 150 members. Each member is elected by voters in an **electorate**. The boundaries of electorates are changed

from time to time so that they all contain roughly the same number of voters.

### Number of House of Representative members for each state and territory

Australian Capital Territory	2
New South Wales	48
Northern Territory	2
Queensland	30
South Australia	11
Tasmania	5
Victoria	37
Western Australia	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>

▲ In the House of Representatives, or the lower house, the government members sit on the right-hand side of the Speaker, while the non-government members sit on the left-hand side of the Speaker.

Speaker

government members

non-government members



## The Senate

The Senate's main role is to act as the house of review, which means it checks all the legislation introduced in the House of Representatives. No legislation can be made law until both the Senate and the House of Representatives agree.

The Senate has the power to introduce its own legislation, but it cannot involve financial or taxation issues. If the Senate passes legislation that it has introduced, then the legislation must go to the House of Representatives for final approval.

▼ The Senate was originally designed as the states' house. Members were supposed to vote in the best interests of their state. However, they now vote according to their political party's wishes.

### Number of Senate members for each state and territory

Australian Capital Territory	2
New South Wales	12
Northern Territory	2
Queensland	12
South Australia	12
Tasmania	12
Victoria	12
Western Australia	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>

### Who keeps the House in order?

The Speaker of the House makes sure that the House of Representatives operates according to the rules and decides who can ask questions. The person with the same role in the Senate is known as the President of the Senate.

### Federal MP snapshot

#### HARRY JENKINS

**Born** 1952, Melbourne, Victoria

**Political career**  
Entered federal politics in 1986 as House of Representatives member for Scullin

**Political party**  
Australian Labor Party

**Position in 2011**  
Speaker of the House of Representatives





# Your say: the best and worst of federal politics



Many young Australians have strong views about the federal government, no matter which political party is in power, but their voices are rarely heard. We asked seven students what they thought were the best and worst things about federal government.

**Question:** What are the best things about federal government?

**Lisa:** I think the best thing is that the government helps people in need.

**Matthew:** Like helping schools by building new halls.

**Lisa:** Yes, that was the stimulus package. Those sorts of things are good.

**Audrey:** They help people from other countries come to Australia.

**Hussein:** Yes, they take in refugees and help them settle in Australia.

**Corey:** I think the best thing about the Government is that they have the power to make people happy.

**Masuma:** I like that voters have such a choice of parties and people to choose from. We can choose the ones that stand for what we want and believe in.

**Question:** And what are the worst things about federal government?

**Masuma:** They seem to argue a lot about unnecessary things. They don't keep promises.

**Hussein:** That's right, they lie to the Australian people.

**Masuma:** I think sometimes they make things worse.

**Corey:** The worst thing about being a federal politician is that people don't like you.

**Alex:** The best thing about the government is the fact that they help schools and hospitals. The worst thing about the government is that they need to care more about average people and talk about things that matter.

## Thanks to ...

Audrey, Lisa, Matthew, Hussein, Corey, Masuma and Alex, Grade 6 and 7 students from Seaton Park Primary School, South Australia.



# Who does what in the government?

Each member of parliament has an equal vote on **legislation** that comes before federal parliament. However, in reality, the Prime Minister and the government's **ministers** have a greater say in how the country is governed.

## The Prime Minister's role

The Prime Minister has the official responsibility for running the country. The Australian people do not vote for the Prime Minister. The leader of the political party that has the most seats in the **House of Representatives** becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister must be a member of the House of Representatives.

The Prime Minister decides the **policy** direction of the Government and chooses which issues are the most important ones to present in parliament and to the Australian people.

Julia Gillard became Prime Minister on 24 June 2010.



## The role of ministers

Ministers are members of parliament who are given a portfolio, which is a position of responsibility that has its own department. Within the federal government, these departments include defence, foreign affairs, communications, and the **Treasury**. Ministers can come from the House of Representatives (lower house) or the Senate (upper house).

Ministers are not expected to know everything about their portfolio. They are advised by senior **public servants** who have the necessary experience and knowledge. Ministers decide what changes are to be made and then make sure that the decisions are carried out. If a major mistake occurs within a portfolio, the minister may have to resign from the ministry, though not from the parliament.

## The role of the Cabinet

The Prime Minister and the most senior ministers of the federal government make up the Cabinet. The Cabinet is responsible for making major policy decisions, even in areas outside their portfolio.

The Cabinet usually meets once a week. Cabinet members are free to argue their points of view in the meeting. However, once a decision is made, every Cabinet member must publicly support the decision, even if they disagree with it.

The Prime Minister chooses which Cabinet positions to give which ministers. At their meetings, the members of the Cabinet make major policy decisions.



## Federal MP snapshot

### JULIA GILLARD

**Born** 1961, Barry, Wales

**Political career**  
Entered federal politics in 1998 as House of Representatives member for Lalor

**Political party**  
Australian Labor Party

**Position in 2011**  
Prime Minister

## Keeping secrets

The written records of all Cabinet meeting discussions and debates are kept secret and not revealed to the public until 30 years after they took place.

## Word watch

### House of Representatives

the lower house of federal parliament

**legislation** laws

**ministers** senior members of parliament, each responsible for a particular area, such as health

**policy** a course of action planned by a government

**public servants** government employees

**Treasury** the government department that looks after the country's money



# What is the role of the opposition?

The opposition is the political party that has the second highest number of seats in the **House of Representatives**. Sometimes two political parties join together to form a **coalition**, such as the Liberal and National parties.



*The Labor Government has proven to be without direction on resources **policy** and has left the sector with no vision, no framework and no guide as to what the future may hold... This is a Government that doesn't understand the resources industry and doesn't seem to care about the damage it causes to one of our economy's most productive sectors.*

▲ In September 2010, Ian Macfarlane, Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources, criticised the Labor Government's decision-making.

## Tweet of the week

@politicalbrain:  
Democracy is best served when there is an effective opposition to keep the government on its toes.



## Making the government keep its promises

A political party, once it is elected, sometimes changes its mind about doing some of the things that it promised. An opposition tries to make a government accountable – that is, make it keep the promises it made during the election campaign.

The opposition has several ways of putting pressure on the government to be fair and accountable. It communicates its concerns to the public through the media, as well as asking the government questions in parliament.

◀ Opposition member Greg Hunt asks the government a question during question time. This is part of the opposition's role of keeping the government accountable.

## Governing for all Australians

The opposition also tries to make sure that the policies and laws introduced by government do not favour one group of people more than others. Federal government is supposed to represent all Australians, not just those from a particular area, such as businesses or **trade unions**.

## Opposition policies

As well as keeping the government accountable, the opposition must develop its own policies to take to the next election. After all, the opposition does not want to remain in opposition, they want to become the government and implement the policies that they believe are best for the country.

## The role of shadow ministers

A shadow minister is a member of the opposition party who is appointed to take a special interest in a particular portfolio. A shadow minister not only criticises the government minister who holds the portfolio, but also develops policies that the opposition can take to the next election to try and win government. The opposition has a Shadow Cabinet made up of senior shadow ministers.



▲ At a meeting of the Shadow Cabinet in July 2010, opposition leader Tony Abbott (second from left) discussed the issue of **asylum seekers**.

## Conflict makes news

Most **legislation** passes through parliament with the support of both the government and the opposition. However, the 20 to 25 per cent of legislation that the opposition opposes receives a lot of coverage in the media.

## Federal MP snapshot

### TONY ABBOTT

**Born** 1957, London, United Kingdom

### Political career

Entered federal politics in 1994 as House of Representatives member for Warringah

### Political party

Liberal Party of Australia

### Position in 2011

Leader of the federal opposition

## Word watch

**asylum seekers** people seeking a home in a new country because they fear for their safety in their own country

**legislation** laws

**trade unions** organisations that fight for the rights of workers

## Word watch

**coalition** partnership  
**House of Representatives** the lower house of federal parliament

**policy** a course of action planned by a government



# Which are the main political parties?

## Back in Canberra: the DLP

In 2010, the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) won a seat in the **Senate**. It had been a force in Australian politics from the 1950s–1970s but had not had a representative in federal parliament since 1974.

Today, there are two dominant political parties (the Labor Party and the Liberal Party), two other main political parties (the National Party and The Greens), and a number of minor political parties.



## Australian Labor Party

- ✱ The oldest existing political party in Australia
- ✱ **Formed:** 1901 (local and state branches were formed as early as 1891)
- ✱ **Aims:** To represent the interests of the **trade union** movement and working people
- ✱ **First leader:** Chris Watson, who was also its first Prime Minister (April–August 1904)
- ✱ **Labor Party Prime Ministers:**  
Chris Watson  
Andrew Fisher  
Billy Hughes  
James Scullin  
John Curtin  
Francis Forde  
Ben Chifley  
Gough Whitlam  
Bob Hawke  
Paul Keating  
Kevin Rudd  
Julia Gillard



## Liberal Party of Australia

- ✱ Replaced the United Australia Party as the main anti-Labor party
- ✱ **Formed:** 1944
- ✱ **Aims:** To represent the interests of the individual and businesses
- ✱ **First leader:** Robert Menzies, who was also its first Prime Minister (1939–41, 1949–66)
- ✱ **Liberal Party Prime Ministers:**  
Robert Menzies  
Harold Holt  
John Gorton  
William McMahon  
Malcolm Fraser  
John Howard  
Tony Abbott



## National Party of Australia

- ✱ Usually forms a **coalition** with the Liberal Party
- ✱ **Formed:** 1920 (originally called the Country Party, changed its name to the National Party in 1982)
- ✱ **Aims:** To represent the interests of farmers and rural communities
- ✱ **First leader:** Earle Page, who was also their first Prime Minister (7 April – 26 April 1939)
- ✱ **Country/National Party Prime Ministers:**  
Earle Page  
Arthur Fadden  
John McEwen



## The Australian Greens

- ✱ Grew from the United Tasmania Group, the world's first Green party
- ✱ **Formed:** 1992 (state parties were formed during the 1980s)
- ✱ **Aims:** To protect the environment and create a more humane society
- ✱ **First leader:** Bob Brown was the first parliamentary leader
- ✱ **Senate:** at least two members since 1990 and at least five since 2007
- ✱ **House of Representatives:** two members (Michael Organ 2002–04, Adam Bandt 2010–)



▲ In 2011 the two dominant political parties were led by Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott.



## Federal MP snapshot

### BOB BROWN

**Born** 1944, Oberon, New South Wales

### Political career

Entered federal politics in 1996 as a senator for Tasmania; formerly member of the Tasmanian Parliament (1983–93)

### Political party

The Greens

### Position in 2011

Leader of The Australian Greens

## Word watch

**Senate** the upper house of federal parliament  
**trade union** an organisation that fights for the rights of workers

## Word watch

**coalition** partnership  
**House of Representatives** the lower house of federal parliament



# The independents and the balance of power

## Federal MP snapshot

### BOB KATTER

**Born** 1945, Cloncurry, Queensland

#### Political career

Entered federal politics in 1993 as **House of Representatives** member for Kennedy, formerly member of Queensland Parliament (1974–92)

## Federal MP snapshot

### ROB OAKESHOTT

**Born** 1969, Lismore, New South Wales

#### Political career

Entered federal politics in 2008 as House of Representatives member for Lyne, formerly member of New South Wales Parliament (1996–2008)

## Word watch

**candidates** people standing for parliament at an election

**electorate** the geographical area represented by one member of parliament

**House of Representatives** the lower house of federal parliament

**policies** courses of action planned by a government

Not all **candidates** for federal elections are members of a political party. Independents are individuals trying to win a seat in parliament without being a member of any political party.

## Why do independents run for parliament?

Independents run for federal parliament to represent their **electorate's** interests. Running as an independent means they do not have to conform to the **policies** of a particular political party. To have a chance of winning a seat in parliament, independents must be well known within their community. For example, many independents who do well in federal elections have already sat in state parliaments. Some have been members of a political party and they may even have already been a member of parliament but have decided to stand as an independent.

## What is the 'balance of power'?

When no political party gains enough seats at an election to rule in its own right, the support of independents or minor parties is needed to be able to govern. In this situation, the independents or minor parties have what is called the 'balance of power'.



▲ Bob Katter, Independent Federal Member for Kennedy, Queensland



▲ Rob Oakeshott, former Independent Federal Member for Lyne, New South Wales

## 2010: the year of the independents

In the 2010 federal election, the Labor Party won 72 seats, the Liberal and National parties won 73 seats, The Greens won one seat and four independents were elected. No party had the 76 seats needed to form government. The elected Greens' representative, Adam Bandt, announced that he would support the Labor Party, bringing the major parties to 73–73 and resulting in a **hung parliament**.

For more than two weeks, Australians did not know who the new government would be. Andrew Wilkie was the first independent to announce his support – he chose the Labor Party. That still left the Labor Party two votes short of forming government.

On 7 September, 17 days after the election, the three remaining independents, all ex-members of the National Party, announced their decisions. Bob Katter supported the Liberal/National Parties; Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor supported the Labor Party. This meant that the Labor Party retained government with the support of 76 members of the House of Representatives. However, the independents reserve the right to oppose any **legislation** that the Labor Party introduces.



▲ Andrew Wilkie, Independent Federal Member for Denison, Tasmania



▲ Tony Windsor, former Independent Federal Member for New England, New South Wales



## Federal MP snapshot

### ANDREW WILKIE

**Born** 1961, Tamworth, New South Wales

#### Political career

Entered federal politics in 2010 as House of Representatives member for Denison, unsuccessfully stood for federal parliament in 2004 and 2007, and for the Tasmanian Parliament in 2010

## Federal MP snapshot

### TONY WINDSOR

**Born** 1950, Quirindi, New South Wales

#### Political career

Entered federal politics in 2001 as House of Representatives member for New England, formerly member of New South Wales Parliament (1991–2001)

## Word watch

**hung parliament** when no party has more than half of the seats in the lower house of parliament

**legislation** laws



# How is a federal government elected?

The Prime Minister has the right to choose when an election is to be held but they must always gain the permission of the Governor-General.

*The Prime Minister's car is approaching the gates of Yarralumla now. All the rumours of the past few weeks were right. In a few minutes, the Prime Minister will be asking the Governor-General's permission to hold a federal election. The remaining question on everyone's lips is 'What date will the election be held?'*

- ▶ When the Prime Minister approaches the Governor-General to call for an election, news reporters quickly inform the public of this important news.



## Three-year terms

In Australia, the federal parliament has three-year **terms**. A prime minister can call an election before the three years is up, but one term of government cannot last longer than three years.



## What does the Governor-General do?

An election cannot be held without the permission of the Governor-General. In fact, all new laws passed by federal parliament have to be approved by the Governor-General before they are **enacted**. This system protects Australia's democracy because it could stop a prime minister doing something that might be against Australia's best interests.

- ◀ Prime Minister Julia Gillard (left) with Governor-General Quentin Bryce after Gillard was elected in June 2010.

## Voting for the House of Representatives

The House of Representatives, the lower house of parliament, is divided into 150 **electorates**. Each electorate is represented by one member of parliament. When an election is called, voters can vote for the **candidate** they think will best represent their values and beliefs. The preferential voting system is used to count votes in the House of Representatives. The political party that wins the most electorates forms government. Each member of the House of Representatives serves for three years before facing election.



- ▲ Local residents vote at the **polling booth** at St Arnaud Town Hall, Victoria, during the 2010 federal election.

## Voting for the Senate

The Senate, the upper house of parliament, is made up of 76 representatives – 12 from each state and two from each territory. The proportional representation voting system is used to count votes in the Senate. Voters can choose to vote for a particular political party or for individual candidates when voting for the Senate. The Senate does not always have a **majority** of members from the political party that forms government in the House of Representatives. The state representatives of the Senate serve for six years before facing election, so only half of them face an election at one time. The territory representatives of the Senate serve for three years before facing election.

## Proportional representation

Proportional representation is a system of voting used when more than one person on the same ballot paper are being elected at the same time. All candidates who receive a certain number of votes are elected.

## Preferential voting

In the preferential voting system, voters select the candidates on their **ballot paper** in order of **preference**. If no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the number '1' votes, the preferences of the least popular candidates are given out until one candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the vote.

## Word watch

**ballot paper** a ticket or paper used in voting  
**candidate** a person standing for election  
**electorates** the geographical areas represented by members of parliament  
**majority** more than half  
**polling booth** the place where people vote  
**preference** choice

## Word watch

**enacted** put into force  
**terms** lengths of time governments serve between elections



# Other political players: lobbyists and the media

## Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when a person can use confidential information to their advantage. Some former politicians become lobbyists, and this can be seen as a conflict of interest because of their 'inside' information.

## Word watch

**candidates** people standing for election

**policies** courses of action planned by a government

Political parties, members of parliament and political **candidates** are not the only players in the world of politics. Two other very important groups are lobbyists and the media. The lobbyists want to influence governments, while governments want to influence the media.

## What does a lobbyist do?

Lobbyists try to convince governments to introduce certain policies, or to try and stop certain **policies** being introduced. They are employed by companies or organisations that want the government to make policies that benefit their businesses or other interests. Lobbyists achieve this in several ways. They:

- ✱ meet with politicians and present their point of view
- ✱ gain media coverage that supports their point of view
- ✱ create advertising and marketing campaigns that promote their point of view.

## CASE STUDY

### Lobbying case study: mining tax

In 2010, the federal government announced that it would introduce a tax on the mining industry. They wanted to use the money from the tax to spend on the general population, arguing that all Australians had the right to benefit from the resources in the ground, not just the mining companies that dug them up and sold them. The mining companies and some business organisations that would be badly affected opposed the new tax and used lobbyists to meet with the government and present their point of view. The mining companies also organised public protests and produced advertisements that explained how the tax would hurt the mining industry and the Australian economy. As a result of this pressure, the government made a lot of changes to the tax, although they still intend to try and have the new tax passed by federal parliament.



▲ Andrew Forrest, head of mining company Fortescue Metals, is part of a demonstration against the new mining super tax at Langley Park in Perth, 2010.

## The media and the political system

The media plays a major role in the Australian political system. Politicians need the media and the media need the politicians. But it does not mean that they are always on good terms. Politicians rely on the media to communicate their messages to the Australian public. The media relies on politicians to provide them with information and stories that the public will want to read about or watch.

In some ways, politicians are like lobbyists. They present their points of view to the media in the hope that the public who consume the media will believe their side of the story and support them.

- ▼ In July 2010, government minister Peter Garrett addressed the media to make an announcement about environmental policy.



## Tweet of the week

@suzieQ26: I know politics is important but do we have to have so much of it in the media? I say, 'No way, Jose!'

## Social media: controlling the message

Politicians are enthusiastic users of social media such as Facebook and Twitter because they can present their views directly to the public without their message being changed.



# Interview with two federal politicians

## Fact File

### Bronwyn Bishop

**Born** 1942, Sydney

**Positions before parliament**  
Solicitor, company director

### Political career

Elected to the **Senate**, 1987, elected to the House of Representatives, 1994. Served as Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel (1996–98) and Minister for Aged Care (1998–2001).

Bronwyn Bishop is the Member of Parliament for Mackellar in New South Wales. She has been a senator, a member of the **House of Representatives** and a **minister**. Jamie Briggs has been the Member of Parliament for Mayo in South Australia since 2008.



▲ Bronwyn Bishop



▲ Jamie Briggs

**Question: What attracted you to politics in the first place?**

**Mrs Bishop:** It was when I was 16 and studying modern history. History taught me that individuals could make a difference – both for good and evil. I wanted to have a say in my country.

**Mr Briggs:** I have a natural interest in politics but I don't come from a political family. In 1992, when Jeff Kennett came to power in Victoria, the state was in a lot of financial trouble but he took decisions very quickly and I admired that action. I have always been attracted to strong leaders.

**Question: Why did you choose to stand for federal parliament, rather than local or state?**

**Mrs Bishop:** I did stand for state parliament for the upper house. Later I was in the **Senate** but switched to the lower house because that is where government is formed and I wanted to be there. I am the only woman who has been a senator, member of the House of Representatives and a minister.

**Mr Briggs:** Federal politics is where the big issues are fought. I hadn't ruled out state politics but I'm drawn more to the federal issues, such as the management of the country's economy, foreign relations and national security.

**Question: What are the best and worst things about federal government?**

**Mrs Bishop:** I don't like to think in terms of good and bad. It is a very full-on life. If you don't have a passion for the work that you do then you couldn't do it. You need to have a high energy level and you need to believe in what you are doing, and in serving people.

**Mr Briggs:** The best things are that you can be a part of remarkable events and that you can help people. I represent 100 000 people in my **electorate** and I have the opportunity to help many of them directly. It's also an opportunity to drive your ideas on how to make the country better. The worst thing is the way many decisions are for the short term, not the long term.

**Question: What is the one thing you would like to achieve above all others in politics?**

**Mrs Bishop:** My father and his generation who fought in World War II gave a wonderful gift of freedom and great opportunities, and I feel a very large responsibility to ensure that future generations get an inheritance at least as good as I got and hopefully better. And I want a society free of racism, sexism and ageism.

**Mr Briggs:** I would like to leave knowing that I did the best job I could and that our generation leaves the country better than we found it for our children.

## Tweet of the week

@futureleader: Look out Bronwyn and Jamie, I'm coming through – and I'll shake things up when I'm an MP.

## Fact File

### Jamie Briggs

**Born**

1977, Kyneton, Victoria

**Positions before parliament**

Employment relations adviser, political adviser

**Political career**

Elected to the House of Representatives, 2008

## Word watch

**House of Representatives** the lower house of federal parliament

**minister** senior member of parliament, each responsible for a particular area, such as health

**Senate** the upper house of federal parliament

## Word watch

**electorate** the geographical area represented by one member of parliament



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