



NO. 3—OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEBATING DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS

On any sitting day, a range of documents and reports is presented to the Senate (or **tabled**). The standing orders also allow for certain documents and reports to be presented to the President and published when the Senate is not sitting. Documents and reports are tabled by committees, ministers and the President. The Clerk tables documents which are required to be presented to the Senate by law or by an order of the Senate.

Committee reports

There are 3 main opportunities for presentation of committee reports: in response to an order of the Senate; in the time set aside on Wednesday afternoons or Thursday mornings, or in the general tabling time each afternoon.

—presented pursuant to order

The Senate may order a committee report to be presented by a certain deadline. This is classed as a Business of the Senate order of the day (see [Brief Guide No. 8—Categories of Business](#)). It therefore appears as an item on the program for that day and the report is tabled when that item of business is reached. With one major exception described below, when a report is presented the only motion which may be moved as of right is a motion for the report to be printed. This motion has the effect of including the report in the parliamentary paper series. Commonly, however, the senator presenting the report moves a motion that the Senate take note of the report but this may occur only if leave (unanimous consent of all senators present in the chamber) is granted. See the table below for speaking time limits.

—presented on Wednesdays and Thursdays

The exception to this practice occurs on Wednesday afternoons and Thursday mornings when up to an hour is available for the presentation and debate of committee reports. If a committee report is presented during this hour, a senator has the right to move that the Senate take note of the report, without seeking leave to do so. Speaking time limits are set out in the table.

—presented under “tabling of documents” each afternoon

The third opportunity for the presentation of committee reports arises from a rule that a committee may report at any time ([standing order 63](#)). This opportunity is listed on the Order of Business (“the Red”) each day as “tabling of documents” and is divided into documents presented by the President, by ministers, by senators tabling reports from committees and by the Clerk. Committees which present regular reports under their terms of reference or joint committees which have already presented their reports to the House of Representatives usually present their reports at this time. Motions to debate these documents require leave. Speaking time limits are set out in the table.

Documents tabled by ministers

Ministers have a right under the standing orders to table documents at any time. Other senators may do so only if leave is granted. The main tablings of government documents occur on Tuesdays and Wednesdays although Ministers may table documents at other times, including by presenting them out of sittings (see below). A list of government documents to be tabled on Tuesdays and Wednesdays is appended to the Red and the documents are tabled immediately after prayers on those days. The documents in this category are often annual or periodic reports, many of which are required by law to be tabled. Treaties are also tabled in this group. Documents which were not available prior to tabling are available from the Table Office as soon as they have been tabled.

On Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 6:50pm, up to half an hour is available for debate on the government documents tabled that day and any documents tabled earlier in the week but not previously considered. The chair calls each one in turn and senators may move a motion to take note of the report and speak to it for 5 minutes. If no other senator wishes to speak on the document, the question may be put and passed, or a senator may adjourn the debate (if he or she has not spoken to the document) or seek leave to continue his or her remarks (if he or she has spoken to it).

Ministers regularly table ministerial statements and government responses to committee reports, which successive governments have undertaken to provide to the Senate within 3 months after the tabling of each committee report. They are usually presented in the afternoons at tabling of documents. Motions to take note of these may be moved by leave. Speaking time limits are set out in the table.

Ministers may table documents on other occasions, for example, in response to an order of the Senate. If this occurs, a senator may move a motion to take note of the documents only by leave. Speaking time limits are set out in the table under ad hoc tablings.

Documents presented by the President

The President tables a variety of documents, including Auditor-General's reports, responses to resolutions of the Senate, documents emanating from the parliamentary departments for which the President has responsibility and documents and reports presented when the Senate is not sitting. These are usually listed on the Red under the relevant item or as an appendix when there is a considerable number of them. Leave is required to move a motion to take note of any of these documents and the time limits set out in the table apply.

—Auditor-General's reports

The Senate's procedures guarantee opportunities for debating Auditor-General's reports. When a report is tabled and no motion is moved, or debate on a motion is adjourned, the report is listed at the end of orders of the day relating to committee reports and government responses for consideration (or reconsideration) on Thursdays for up to an hour, beginning not later than 7pm.

—documents presented out of sitting

Any document or report which has been presented to the President when the Senate is not sitting is tabled under "tabling of documents" in the afternoon of the next available sitting day. Senators wishing to speak to the report or document may then seek leave to move a motion to take note of it.

Documents presented by the Clerk

The most important categories of documents presented by the Clerk are disallowable instruments and other instruments of delegated legislation (see [Brief Guide No. 1—Disallowance](#)) which have the same force of law as Acts of the Parliament. Any Senator may seek leave to move a motion to take note of a document in this group, but they are usually debated only on motions to disallow them. Speaking time limits are set out in the table.

Follow-up debate

So far, this Guide has described opportunities for debate on the presentation of reports and documents. There are also regular opportunities to return to adjourned debates on the following:

- government documents;
 - committee reports and government responses;
 - Auditor-General's reports.
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Where debate on a motion to take note of a government document is not concluded on the day of tabling, the item is listed on the *Notice Paper* under "Orders of the day relating to Government Documents" and may be returned to on the following Thursday during the time set aside for debate of General Business. Any document not debated on the day of tabling or any subsequent opportunity for consideration of government documents is also listed for consideration on the following Thursday's General Business, when senators have the opportunity to move a motion to take note of the document and speak to it.

Similarly, adjourned debates on motions to take note of committee reports or government responses to committee reports are listed on the *Notice Paper* and returned to on the following Thursday, after General Business.

Auditor-General's reports are listed on the *Notice Paper* after committee reports and government responses to be dealt with on Thursdays in any remaining time available.

By moving motions to adjourn the debate or seeking leave to continue their remarks, senators may keep documents on the *Notice Paper* for successive Thursdays, but no senator may speak to a document on more than 3 occasions, once on the day of tabling and up to twice more on Thursdays during General Business and Consideration of Committee Reports and Government Responses.

Confused?

There are many opportunities for senators to debate documents. For any clarification and advice, government senators should contact the Clerk Assistant (Table), on extension 3020 and non-government senators the Clerk Assistant (Procedure), on extension 3380.

February 2005

This publication is available electronically at <http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/pubs/guides/index.htm>.

Debate on tabled reports and documents—Summary

Document/report tabled by...	When tabled	Is there a right to speak?	Time limits	If debate is adjourned, when will it come on again?
Minister				
(a) on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, as government documents	immediately after Prayers	yes—when documents are called on at 6.50pm that day, a motion to take note may be moved; any documents not reached on Tuesdays may be debated on Wednesdays if any time remains	5 minutes per speaker on each motion; total of 30 minutes	not later than 6pm on the following Thursday for up to an hour—depending on when General Business began; 5 minutes per speaker on each adjourned motion
(b) at other times, as government documents		these documents may be debated on Tuesdays or Wednesdays at 6.50 pm if any time remains after documents tabled on those days are called on; otherwise, a motion may be moved by leave to take note	on Tuesdays or Wednesdays at 6.50 pm – 5 minutes per speaker on each motion; total of 30 minutes; otherwise 10 minutes per speaker; total of 30 minutes for each document and 60 minutes for all consecutive motions on documents	on Thursdays, as above
(c) government responses to committee reports	each afternoon but in practice usually on Thursdays	no—unless leave is granted for a motion to be moved	10 minutes per speaker; total of 30 minutes for each document and 60 minutes for all consecutive motions on documents	not later than 7pm on Thursdays for up to an hour; 10 minutes per speaker on each adjourned motion
(d) ministerial statements	each afternoon	no—unless leave is granted for a motion to be moved	10 minutes per speaker; total of 30 minutes for each document and 60 minutes for all consecutive motions on documents	unless special arrangements are made, such items will return for debate only when (and if) they are reached on the list of Government Business
(e) ad hoc	at any time	no—unless leave is granted for a motion to be moved	10 minutes per speaker; total of 30 minutes for each document and 60 minutes for all consecutive motions on documents	in practice, only by special arrangement

Document/report tabled by...	When tabled	Is there a right to speak?	Time limits	If debate is adjourned, when will it come on again?
Committees				
(a) pursuant to order	whenever the relevant order of the day is reached on the program	no—unless leave is granted for a motion to take note	10 minutes per speaker; total of 30 minutes for each report and 60 minutes for all consecutive motions on documents	not later than 7pm on the following Thursday, for up to an hour; 10 minutes per speaker on each adjourned motion
(b) Wednesdays and Thursdays	Wednesday afternoon; Thursday morning	yes, a motion to take note may be moved without leave	10 minutes per speaker on each motion; total of 60 minutes	not later than 7pm on the following Thursday, for up to an hour; 10 minutes per speaker on each adjourned motion
(c) at “tabling of documents”	each afternoon	no—unless leave is granted for a motion to be moved	10 minutes per speaker; total of 30 minutes for each report and 60 minutes for all consecutive motions on documents	not later than 7pm on the following Thursday, for up to an hour; 10 minutes per speaker on each adjourned motion
The President	each afternoon	no—unless leave is granted for a motion to be moved	10 minutes per speaker; total of 30 minutes for each document and 60 minutes for all consecutive motions on documents	in practice, only by special arrangement except for Auditor-General’s reports which are listed at the end of orders of the day relating to committee reports etc for debate on the following Thursday from not later than 7pm for up to an hour. 10 minutes per speaker per motion.
The Clerk	each afternoon	only on a motion on notice to disallow, otherwise by leave	on disallowance motions, 20 minutes per speaker, no total limit; on motions by leave, 10 minutes per speaker; total of 30 minutes for each document and 60 minutes for all consecutive motions on documents	if a disallowance motion is adjourned, debate will resume on the next sitting day in the normal course of business; a motion moved by leave to take note of the document resumes, in practice, only by special arrangement