

11 Opportunities for debating documents and reports

On any sitting day, a range of documents is presented to the Senate (or **tabled**). These documents mainly fall into two categories: committee reports and other documents.

The standing orders establish the main opportunities to table documents (see [Guide No. 10](#)—Tabling of documents) and specify times for their debate. Senators wishing to debate documents at other times require leave (unanimous consent of all senators present).

1. Committee reports and government responses

An hour is set aside on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in each sitting week to present and debate committee reports and government responses to committee reports. During that hour, senators may move motions relating to those documents without the requirement to seek leave. Each senator may speak for 10 minutes, with a total time limit of one hour for all motions.

One exception to this is reports presented pursuant to a recommendation of the Selection of Bills Committee. These reports may not be debated without leave, the rationale being that debate should take place when the bill itself is called on (for example, during the second reading debate). Such reports are listed further down on the Red, as business of the Senate orders of the day (see [Guide No. 4](#)—Categories of Business).

2. Other documents

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday a list of documents to be presented will be attached to the Red. These documents include:

- annual reports and other government documents
- treaties
- reports of the Auditor-General
- responses to Senate resolutions
- parliamentary administration documents.

Documents that have been presented out of sitting are also shown on this list.

On each of these days, 30 minutes is set aside in the afternoon for consideration of these documents. During this time the documents are called on and a senator may move to take note without the requirement to seek leave. Each senator may speak for 5 minutes. Any documents not reached on any day roll over to the next day, are listed on the [online Notice Paper](#), and are again available for consideration. Any remaining documents then roll over for consideration during general business on Thursday, usually commencing at 6pm.

3. Ministerial statements

Ministers have a right to table documents at any time and there is a time set aside each afternoon for the tabling of ministerial statements. [Standing order 169\(3\)](#) provides that senators may move to take note of ministerial statements without seeking leave. Time limits for these debates are set out below.

Ministerial statements may also be included with the list of documents to be presented on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and in these circumstances the requirement for leave and the rules for debate set out in [standing order 61](#) apply.

4. Follow-up debate

Any committee reports, government responses or other documents presented that have not come up for debate, or on which debate has not concluded, are listed on the *Notice Paper* on Thursday under one of the following headings:

- Documents
- Committee Reports and Government Responses; and
- Auditor-General's Reports.

At the specified time – typically from 6 pm each sitting Thursday - the Chair will call on the documents in order, and sometimes in groups.

Where 'debate adjourned' is shown next to a document on the *Notice Paper*, senators may resume debate on that document. Where the *Notice Paper* indicates a document is listed for 'consideration', a senator may move to take note of the document, and then any senator may speak to that motion.

By moving to adjourn the debate or seeking leave to continue their remarks, senators may keep documents on the *Notice Paper* for debate on successive Thursdays.

5. Documents presented by the Clerk

The Clerk presents documents required to be tabled pursuant to statute or pursuant to an order of the Senate. Many of these are disallowable instruments and other instruments of delegated legislation 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 (see [Guide No. 19](#)—Disallowance). These documents are listed on the Red for presentation early on each sitting day.

6. Ad hoc consideration of documents

The times and procedures set out above account for the vast majority of documents tabled in the Senate, but documents will sometimes be tabled at other times.

For instance, ministers have a right under the standing orders to table documents at any time and on occasion do table documents at times other than the time set aside each afternoon for the tabling of ministerial statements.

Sometimes it may be necessary for committee chairs to table reports outside of the specified times, and they may do so provided there is no other business before the chair. Other senators may table documents only if leave is granted, or if they are acting pursuant to an order of the Senate.

In each case, a senator would require the leave of the Senate to move to take note of these documents. [Standing order 169](#) limits the time for debates on motions moved by leave.

7. Time limits

The time limits for consideration of documents are set out in the following table.

Committee reports and government responses		
Motions relating to report on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday	10 mins	(limit for debate: 1 hr)
Resumption, including Auditor-General's reports (<i>Thursdays</i>)	10 mins	(limit for debate: 1 hr)
Motions moved by leave	10 mins	(limit for debate: 30 mins per motion, 1 hr for all motions)
Other documents		
Motions to take note (<i>Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday</i>)	5 mins	(limit for debate: 30 mins)
Resumption (<i>Thursday</i>)	5 mins	(limit for debate: 1 hr – but subject to 2½ hours total for general business)
Motions moved by leave	5 mins	(limit for debate: 15 mins per motion, 30 mins for all motions)
Ministerial statements		
Motion to take note	10 mins	(limit for debate: 30 mins per motion, 1 hr for all motions)

Need assistance?

For assistance with any of the matters covered by this guide, government senators or their staff should contact the Clerk Assistant (Table), on extension 3020 or ca.table.sen@aph.gov.au and non-government senators or their staff should contact the Clerk Assistant (Procedure), on extension 3380 or ca.procedure.sen@aph.gov.au.

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