

11. Opportunities for debating documents and reports

On any sitting day, a range of documents are presented to the Senate (or tabled). The standing orders establish the main opportunities to table documents (see [Guide No. 10](#)—Tabling of documents) and specify times for their debate.

Committee reports and government responses

Time is set aside on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoon for tabling and consideration of committee reports and government responses to committee reports. During this time, after a committee report or government response is tabled, a senator may move a motion to take note of the report or response. Senators speaking during the debate on this motion may speak for up to 10 minutes each, with an overall time limit of 1 hour for the tabling and consideration of all committee reports and government responses tabled that day.

Committee reports and government responses that are presented out of sitting are available for consideration on the next sitting day.

Reports relating to bills referred pursuant to a recommendation of the Selection of Bills Committee may not be debated. The rationale for this is that debate should take place when the bill itself is called on.

Other documents

[Standing order 61](#) provides for the routine presentation of documents by ministers and the President on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. A list of documents to be presented on each day is attached to the *Order of Business* (the Red) for that day.

On each of these days, 30 minutes is set aside in the afternoon for consideration of the documents listed on the Red. During this time the documents are called on and a senator may move to take note. Each senator may speak for 5 minutes. Any documents not reached on any day roll over to the next day. After Wednesday, any remaining documents are listed on *the Notice Paper* for consideration on Thursday afternoon, after the tabling and consideration of committee reports.

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. A ministerial statement is a formal statement by a minister about a matter of public policy, government activity or an issue in the minister's portfolio. After a ministerial statement has been tabled a senator may move a motion to take note of the statement ([Standing order 169\(3\)](#)).

Ministerial statements may also be tabled on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday by ministers under standing order 61 and will be shown on the list of documents attached to the Red. In these circumstances the opportunities for debate explained under the heading 'Other documents' apply.

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 in the routine of business the Chair will call on the documents in order, and sometimes in groups (for instance, by page number).

When a document is called on by the Chair, a senator may speak in relation to the document for up to 5 minutes.

If a senator wants to preserve the opportunity to speak in relation to a document on a future Thursday, they can do so by 'seeking leave to continue their remarks' in relation to the document. The document will then be listed on the *Notice Paper* for debate on the next Thursday.

Documents presented by the Clerk

At the start of each sitting day, the Clerk presents documents required to be tabled pursuant to statute or pursuant to an order of the Senate. Many of these are instruments of delegated legislation. These documents are usually 'considered' only when a motion is moved to disallow the instrument (see [Guide No. 19](#)—Disallowance).

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. Committee chairs are also able to table reports in between items of business. 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.

Time limits

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

Committee reports and government responses		
Motion to take note (Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday)	10 mins	(limit for debate: 1 hr*)
Resumption, including Auditor-General's reports (Thursday)	5 mins	(limit for debate: 1 hr*)
Motions moved by leave	10 mins	(limit for debate: 30 mins per motion, 1 hr for all motions)
Documents		
Motions to take note (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday)	5 mins	(limit for debate: 30 mins)
Resumption (Thursday)	5 mins	(limit for debate: 1 hr*)
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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