

HOUSE REVIEW



Selected features of House of Representatives business

Sitting period 11 – 13 May 2021 (no. 39)

The first sitting week of the Winter sittings had as a key focus the presentation of and formal reply to the 2021–2022 Budget. The week also featured the passage of six bills and the presentation of 16 committee reports. Other proceedings included: an address of condolence; two ministerial statements; a matter of privilege raised by a Member; and motions relating to the membership of committees.

Sitting arrangements – COVID-19

Upon commencement of the sitting on 11 May, the [Speaker](#) made a [statement](#) in relation to COVID-19 arrangements during the budget sittings. Some of the key changes since the last sitting included an increase in the density of seating in the Chamber and Federation Chamber; and a new requirement for certain individuals to scan QR codes for contact tracing purposes—members of the press using the press gallery, advisers entering either chamber, and visitors entering the Federation Chamber. The Speaker indicated that some practices would continue, such as the tellers standing in the centre of the Chamber during divisions, and questions being put in such a way as to minimise the need for most Members to cross the chamber floor.

Sitting arrangements – Budget Day

In relation to the sitting for 11 May the [Leader of the House](#) moved, by leave, to suspend standing orders to put in place special arrangements, relating to an Address of Condolence to Her Majesty on the death of HRH The Prince Philip, including a suspension of the House following the address and a further suspension prior to the presentation of the Budget in the evening. Suspensions of the House can occur subject to specific standing orders or a resolution of the House. Otherwise they are generally with the agreement of Members.

Address of Condolence — Death of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

On 11 May the [Prime Minister](#) moved that the House agree to an address to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, in relation to the death of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. The motion was supported by the [Leader of the Opposition](#), the [Leader of the House](#), the [Deputy Leader of the Opposition](#), and the [Deputy Prime Minister](#). All Members rose in silence, and the address was agreed to. The House then suspended for 90 minutes, as a mark of respect. Such addresses are transmitted to Her Majesty, through the Governor-General, by way of a letter from the Speaker.

Suspension of standing orders to facilitate the presentation of the Budget and reply

On 11 May the Leader of the House, pursuant to notice, moved to suspend standing orders to facilitate the presentation of the Budget that evening and the Leader of the Opposition's reply on 13 May. Such a motion is moved each year to prevent the automatic adjournment of the House from taking effect prior to the [Treasurer](#)'s speech and the Leader of the Opposition's reply, and to remove the limit on new business after the normal time for the adjournment, enabling the remainder of the Budget bills to be presented following the Treasurer's speech. The motion further provided that, on completion of the reply on 13 May, the House would automatically stand adjourned until 10 am on Monday, 24 May.

Revised ministry list

On 11 May the Prime Minister presented a revised [ministry list](#). As is standard practice, the list was printed in the [Hansard for that day](#), on pages 7 to 8.

Marking the death of a former Member

When the sitting resumed following its 90 minute suspension at 2.09 pm on 11 May, the Prime Minister moved a condolence motion on the death of the [Honourable Andrew Sharp Peacock AC](#), Member for Kooyong from 1966 to 1994 and a former Minister. The Leader of the Opposition supported the motion, and the Speaker conveyed a message from Mr Peacock's family. Further debate was referred to the Federation Chamber and took place on 13 May. The motion was agreed to in the House immediately before Question Time on that day.

Resolution from the ACT Legislative Assembly

On 11 May the Speaker advised the House that he had received a letter from the Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly, enclosing a copy of a resolution passed on 31 March 2021 relating to the need to restore territory rights regarding voluntary assisted dying. The Speaker presented the document.

Committee membership changes

After Question Time on 11 May, the [Deputy Speaker](#) reported changes to the membership of certain committees that had taken effect under standing order 229(b) during the period when the House was not sitting. In accordance with the standing order a Minister then moved a motion to confirm those changes. An amendment was moved by the [Manager of Opposition Business](#), who was closed on division. After the amendment was seconded but before the question on the amendment was stated, the original question was closed on division, and the motion relating to the committee membership changes was agreed to on the voices. It is not common for an amendment to be moved to a motion relating to committee membership.

Subsequently, the Manager of Opposition Business moved a motion to discharge the [Member for Bowman](#) from the [Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training](#). The mover and seconder were closed and the question was then closed and the motion defeated on division.

A change to the membership of the [Joint Select Committee on Road Safety](#) was agreed to on 13 May.

Budget

At 7.30 pm on Tuesday 11 May a message from the Governor-General was announced by the Speaker, recommending in accordance with the Constitution, an appropriation for the purposes of the [Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 2021-2022](#). The Treasurer then presented the bill (known as the 'main' budget bill), and an Explanatory Memorandum. After the first reading by the Clerk, the Treasurer moved that the bill be read a second time and made the traditional Budget speech. Debate was then adjourned and the [Assistant Treasurer](#) presented Budget Papers 1 to 4, a Women's budget statement 2021-22, and a regional budget statement. The two other usual appropriation bills were each introduced following the required message from the Governor-General. On the evening of Thursday 13 May, just after 7.30 pm, the Leader of the Opposition spoke in reply as the main Opposition speaker on resumption of debate on the second reading of the main budget bill.

The Speaker reminded Members on Tuesday that standing orders allow the Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition unlimited time on their second reading speeches on the main appropriation bill, although they typically limit themselves to around 30 minutes. The clocks in the Chamber are set for 30 minutes to assist with timing but not to limit speeches formally. When debate is resumed in the next sitting week, all Members will be able to speak for up to 15 minutes during the second reading stage and many Members are expected to take the opportunity to speak. The second reading debate on the main appropriation bill is freed from the usual obligation to ensure that speeches are relevant to the question. Instead, public affairs may be debated.

On Tuesday the House rose at 8.18 pm, instead of the usual 8 pm, and on Thursday it rose at 8.07 pm, instead of 5 pm. On Tuesday the House suspended from 4.27 pm to 7.30 pm, and on Thursday from 6.43 pm to 7.30 pm. As noted earlier, these arrangements were enabled by a resolution agreed to on Tuesday. There was no adjournment debate on either day.

As is the custom in Budget week, there were many visitors to Parliament House and a strong media presence, with the Treasurer, Shadow Treasurer, Ministers and Shadow Ministers all participating in interviews. Members of the press also participated in the traditional Budget Day 'lock up'. During Question Time, the Budget, taxation, and the economy were the subject of many questions. Ultimately, though, Budget arrangements are encapsulated in bills that must begin their life in the House, be scrutinised there and in the Senate, and agreed to by both Houses. As 28 June is the last scheduled parliamentary sitting day before the end of the financial year, it is necessary that the appropriation bills will have passed both Houses.

Legislation

Over the course of the three sitting days this week, 11 [bills were presented](#) and six bills were passed by the House.

Introductions

All 11 bills introduced in the House this week were Government bills. While the appropriation bills associated with the Government's budget received a great deal of attention, some of the topics of other government bills introduced this week included private health insurance and the regulation of the education and finance sectors.

Passing the House

Of the six bills passing the House this week, one Government bill was presented and passed on the same day. The Migration Amendment (Tabling Notice of Certain Character Decisions) Bill 2021 was introduced on the morning of 12 May. On completion of the Minister's second reading speech, debate was adjourned to a later hour, by leave. (Debate is ordinarily made an order of the day for the next sitting.) Later in the day, the bill was debated cognately with a related bill, and detailed Government amendments were agreed to. Both bills passed all stages on the voices.

Parliamentary committees

Committees continued their work during the fortnight with meetings, public hearings and presentation of 16 reports. Reports addressed topics ranging from [family, domestic and sexual violence](#), [public communications campaigns targeting drug and substance abuse](#), [the review of listings of terrorist organisations](#), and [Australia's defence relationship with Pacific island nations](#). In relation to the work of the House, the [Appropriations and Administration Committee](#) presented a [report](#) relating to the budget estimates to support the operations of the Department of the House of Representatives for 2021-22. The [Standing Committee on Procedure](#) also presented the [report](#) of its inquiry into the House's practices and procedures in relation to Question Time. A comprehensive list of reports, with hyperlinks, is published in [Last Week in the House](#).

On the afternoon of 11 May, prior to the presentation of the Budget, the [Chair](#) of the [Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit](#) made the usual annual statement concerning the draft budget estimates for the Australian National Audit Office and the Parliamentary Budget Office for 2021–2022. This fulfilled the Committee's responsibilities under the [Public Accounts and Audit Committee Act 1951](#) and the [Parliamentary Service Act 1999](#).

On 12 May three proposed works were referred to the [Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works](#) for inquiry and report. This is a requirement under the [Public Works Committee Act 1969](#).

Federation Chamber—Private Members' business on a Wednesday

On Wednesday 12 May much of the Federation Chamber's time was devoted to private Members' business. This was enabled by a resolution in the preceding sitting week, providing time for private

Members' business in a week when there would otherwise be none, as the Monday was not a sitting day.

Motions to suspend standing orders

As well as the suspension motions moved by the Leader of the House to facilitate the business of the House, motions to suspend standing orders were moved without notice by the Member for Griffith on 12 and 13 May. These related to the Member for Bowman, and in both cases the mover and seconder were closed, and the question on the motion was put and defeated on division.

Matter of privilege raised

At the commencement of the sitting on 13 May, the [Member for Hughes](#) raised as a matter of privilege the decision of Facebook to suspend his account, which he claimed prevented him from carrying out his duties as a Member, including communicating with constituents. He presented documents including copies of newspaper articles. The Speaker responded that he would consider the matter in the usual way and report back to the House. Standing orders provide a framework for the raising and consideration of matters of privilege.

Ministerial statements

Two ministerial statements were made this week: on 12 May by the [Minister representing the Minister for Women](#), in relation to the women's budget statement for 2021-22, to which [Ms Plibersek](#) replied on behalf of the Opposition; and on 13 May by the [Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development](#) in relation to rural and regional budget outcomes, to which [Ms C. F. King](#) replied.

Communication with the Senate

With Senate Estimates scheduled to take place during the next two House sitting weeks, many of the Senate messages this week related to bills considered this week. Seven bills were returned to the House without amendments or requests from the Senate. Two bills were returned with amendments. Upon the reporting of Senate amendments to the [Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Amendment \(Extension and Other Measures\) Bill 2021](#), a Minister moved that the amendments be considered immediately. The [Member for Melbourne](#) moved an amendment to the motion to delay consideration, which was defeated. The Minister's motion was then agreed to, and the Senate's amendments were subsequently agreed to, after debate.

The House is scheduled to meet next on 24 May, which coincides with the start of a fortnight of Senate Estimates.

Further information on the work of the House

[Bills and legislation](#) – access bills, explanatory memoranda, amendments, speeches, information about key stages of a bill's consideration, and a tracking option

[Live Minutes](#) – a real time summary of House decisions and proceedings. When used in conjunction with the [Daily Program](#), the Live Minutes are a simple way to track the House's work each day

[House of Representatives Practice](#) 7 ed., 2018 – the most authoritative guide to House procedure