

HOUSE REVIEW



Selected features of House of Representatives business

Sitting period 15 – 25 March 2021 (no. 38)

The final fortnight of the Autumn sittings featured the passage of 19 bills and the presentation of 13 committee reports. The sittings also featured: two condolence motions, consideration of many bills, and progress on a range of matters resulting from communication between the Houses.

Condolence motions

On 15 March the [Prime Minister](#) moved a condolence motion for Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, a former Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea. Sir Michael was PNG's first and longest-serving Prime Minister. Members paid tribute to his central role in PNG achieving independence and in the continuing close relationship between PNG and Australia.

On 17 March the Prime Minister moved a condolence motion for [Christopher John Hurford](#), Member for Adelaide from 1969 to 1987 and a minister in the Hawke Government. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition both highlighted his record as a respected Minister for Immigration, who had come to Australia as a 'ten-pound Pom'.

Both motions were referred to the Federation Chamber, where further speeches were made.

Federation Chamber—suspensions, and arrangements for Budget Week

On 15 March the Federation Chamber suspended four times during its afternoon session. One of the suspensions was to allow Members to attend a division in the House, as required by standing order 190(a). The Federation Chamber does not usually suspend if there is a quorum required in the House. However, if Members decide to attend a quorum call in the House and the quorum is lost in the Federation Chamber, standing order 190(b) requires the Deputy Speaker to suspend the Federation Chamber. Two of the suspensions occurred when the quorum was lost for this reason and a third when the Deputy Speaker suspended the Federation Chamber in anticipation of the loss of a quorum for the same reason.

On 22 March the House agreed to a suspension of standing orders relating to the business of the Federation Chamber. The motion allowed the Selection Committee to select items of private Members' business and committee and delegation business for consideration during Budget Week, on Wednesday, 12 May 2021, as in Budget Week the House does not sit on the Monday, which is the usual day for such business to be considered. On 24 March the Speaker presented the [report](#) of the Selection Committee containing its determinations relating to business in the Federation Chamber on 12 May. Although the Federation Chamber would usually meet on a sitting Tuesday, it is customary for the meeting not to take place on Budget Day, which this year will occur on Tuesday, 11 May. At the conclusion of its meeting on 25 March, the Federation Chamber therefore adjourned until Wednesday, 12 May.

Deferred division on a motion for the suspension of standing orders

Shortly after commencement of the sitting on 23 March, the [Member for Warringah](#) moved a motion to suspend standing orders without notice. The aim of the proposed suspension was to bring on debate on the [Sex Discrimination Amendment \(Prohibiting All Sexual Harassment\) Bill 2021](#), a private Member's bill, and to give it priority over all other business until finally determined by the House. The seconder and one other Member spoke in favour of the motion and a minister spoke against it.

The standing orders allow a maximum of 25 minutes for debate on a motion without notice to suspend standing orders. At the expiry of the time allowed the question on the suspension motion was put and, it being the period of deferred divisions between noon and 2 pm on Tuesdays, the division was deferred until after the conclusion of the matter of public importance that day. When the division was held later that day the motion was defeated.

Appointment of a new Registrar of Members' Interests

On 25 March the Speaker informed the House that he had appointed Mr Peter Banson, Deputy Clerk of the House of Representatives, as Registrar of Members' Interests. The appointment was made in accordance with paragraph 3(a) of the [resolution of the House](#) first adopted on 9 October 1984 and last amended on 19 September 2019. The Registrar is responsible for maintaining and providing advice on the Register of Members' Interests. The Register can be viewed on the [Parliament of Australia website](#). Members can notify the Registrar of alterations to their statement of registrable interests through a dedicated [intranet page](#) for Members.

Legislation

Over the course of the fortnight, 19 [bills were presented](#) and 19 bills were passed by the House. Several pieces of legislation were progressed through the House, including bills that originated in the Senate.

Introductions

During the fortnight, 15 Government bills were presented, including five originating in the Senate. Subjects included taxation, international obligations in relation to plastic wastes, arrangements pertaining to the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, overseas students, the establishment of a uniform scheme of automatic mutual recognition of occupation registration between States, a change in the name of an industry research and development body, biosecurity, work health and safety on Norfolk Island, mitochondrial donation, a scheme for sharing motor vehicle service and repair information, the establishment of new federal family violence orders, and confidentiality provisions for information given to the independent review into the workplaces of parliamentarians and their staff, conducted by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner. On 17 March a customs tariff proposal was also moved.

Four private Members' bills were introduced. These related to [sex discrimination](#), the publication of information on government investment in [rural and regional Australia](#), the establishment of a [Commonwealth Environment Protection Authority](#), and prohibiting [Snowy Hydro](#) from undertaking certain activities relating to fossil fuel-based electricity generation.

Passing the House

Seventeen Members spoke during the second reading debate on the [National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment \(Supporting Economic Recovery\) Bill 2020](#). The opposition's second reading amendment was defeated following a division and the second reading was agreed to on the voices. Leave was not granted for the third reading to be moved immediately and a minister moved a suspension of standing orders to allow this to be done. Debate ensued on the suspension motion and a closure was moved. Following a division on the closure motion the suspension motion was agreed to on the voices and the third reading was agreed to following a division.

On 16 and 17 March the [Social Services Legislation Amendment \(Strengthening Income Support\) Bill 2021](#) was debated. At the beginning of the debate [Ms Burney](#) moved a second reading amendment. Following another 18 speakers [Mr Bandt](#) moved an amendment proposing to add words to the opposition amendment. After a further six speakers Mr Bandt's amendment was defeated on division and the opposition amendment, in its original form, was also defeated on division. The second reading was agreed to on the voices, an opposition detailed amendment was defeated following a division, and the third reading was agreed to on the voices.

[Appropriation Bill \(No. 3\) 2020-2021](#) and [Appropriation Bill \(No. 4\) 2020-2021](#) were debated in the House on 18, 22 and 23 March, in a cognate debate, and in the Federation Chamber on 24 and 25 March. In total, 60 Members contributed to the second reading debate during the fortnight—38 in the Chamber and 22 in the Federation Chamber. Standing order 76 provides an exception for appropriation bills to the requirement for relevance in debate, and allows debate on ‘public affairs’. In effect, this allows Members to speak on almost any subject, and many Members take the opportunity to discuss matters pertaining to their electorates as well as wider issues. Following consideration in the Federation Chamber on 25 March, the bills were reported in the House and the remaining stages were agreed to, on the voices.

At 4.20 pm on 25 March, following discussion of the matter of public importance and the consideration of the remaining stages of the appropriation bills reported from the Federation Chamber and the conclusion of one other bill interrupted earlier that day, the House postponed business intervening before the order of the day on the [Archives and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021](#), which had been transmitted from the Senate earlier in the week. At 4.30 pm, after the second reading debate had been resumed, the question on the adjournment, automatically proposed by the Chair in accordance with standing order 31, was required by a minister to be put immediately without debate. The question on the adjournment was negatived on the voices, and the second reading debate on the bill continued. The second reading was agreed on the voices, and the bill was considered in detail. Ms Steggall moved a detailed amendment, which was agreed to on the voices, after debate. The bill, as amended, was then agreed to and the bill read a third time. The House’s amendment to the bill will be transmitted to the Senate for concurrence, although this can not occur until the Senate next sits, which is expected to be on 11 May.

Visitors during Question Time

On occasion during Question Time the [Speaker](#) will announce the presence of a distinguished visitor. On 16 March he informed the House that His Excellency Mr Shingo Yamagami (the new ambassador of Japan) and [Lisa Singh](#) (a former senator for Tasmania) were present in the gallery. The next day, the Speaker informed the House that the [Hon. Bronwyn Bishop](#) (a former senator, former member, former minister and former Speaker of the House) and the Hon. Michael Atkinson (former Speaker of the South Australian House of Assembly) were present in the gallery.

Parliamentary committees

Seven committees presented reports of inquiries during the period: the [Joint Select Committee on Australia’s Family Law System](#) (15 March), the [Joint Standing Committee on Treaties](#) (16 March), the [Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth](#), the [Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights](#) and the [Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works](#) (17 March), the [Joint Standing Committee on Migration](#) (18 March) and the [Standing Committee on Agriculture and Water Resources](#) (23 March). When reports are presented in the House outside the usual period on Monday mornings set aside for committee and delegation reports, it is common for the Chair and one non-government Member to make statements by leave. If other Members wish to speak about the report, a take note motion is moved and the order of the day is referred to the Federation Chamber. The reports of the Family Law, Trade and Investment Growth, Migration, and Agriculture and Water Resources Committees were referred to the Federation Chamber and in each case the take note motion was debated on the next sitting day.

The report of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration was presented by the Chair, the Member for Berowra ([Mr Leeson](#)). The standing orders allow the Member who presents the report to move the take note motion. However, Mr Leeson was not in the Chamber at the relevant time and [Mr Alexander](#), a member of the committee, moved the take note motion by leave.

Matter of public importance discussions

This fortnight, topics for the one-hour discussions after Question Time on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays included: Jobkeeper; economic support to industries affected by COVID-19; housing; energy; aged care; and the interests of Australians.

Communication with the Senate

Twenty messages from the Senate were reported during the period, all of which were as a result of the Senate's sittings in the first week of the fortnight (Senate Estimates were held in the second half of the fortnight, resulting in a House-only sitting week), and 16 of which were reported after the time for private Members' business in the House on 22 March. Some messages returned bills without amendment or advised of appointments to joint committees but several required action by the House.

On 16 March a message was reported informing the House that the Senate had agreed to the House's resolution to establish a Joint Select Committee on Road Safety. On 17 March opposition Members were appointed to the committee.

On 16 March the [Treasury Laws Amendment \(Reuniting More Superannuation\) Bill 2020](#) was returned with amendments, which were agreed to without debate.

On 22 March several messages from the Senate were reported. Five of the messages transmitted bills for the concurrence of the House. All were government bills. The number of government bills initiated in the Senate has traditionally been low, although in recent years it has been increasing. Each of the bills was read a first time and the second reading made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Another message returned the [Fair Work Amendment \(Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery\) Bill 2021](#) to the House with amendments. The House agreed to consider the amendments immediately. During debate on the motion that the amendments be agreed to, the [Manager of Opposition Business](#) moved amendments to the Senate amendments. These were disagreed to on division and the Senate amendments were then agreed to in their original form, also on division.

A further message transmitted a resolution of the Senate calling on the government to establish a Royal Commission to inquire into the rate of suicide among current and former Australian Defence Force personnel, and requesting the concurrence of the House in the resolution. The House agreed that the message be considered immediately, and the [Minister for Veterans' Affairs](#) moved that the House concur with the resolution of the Senate. A further 23 Members spoke in support of the motion before it was agreed to on the voices.

The House and Senate are both scheduled to meet next on Budget Day, 11 May 2021.

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