

HOUSE REVIEW



Selected features of House of Representatives business

Sitting period 3 – 12 August 2021 (no. 42)

This sitting fortnight featured considerable changes to the operation of the House as a result of travel and other restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirteen committee reports were presented and legislation was debated, with the quick passage of a bill relating to the economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Statement by the Speaker—special arrangements for the operation of the Chamber

Sittings commenced on 3 August with the [Speaker](#) making a statement on the arrangements for the operation of the Parliament as a result of the current circumstances of the pandemic. As outlined in a [statement made by the Presiding Officers](#) the week prior, the Speaker confirmed that Parliament House would be closed to the public and some passholders from 2 August to 3 September. All building occupants were asked to wear masks wherever possible, including in the Chamber, and reduced seating arrangements were reintroduced in the Chamber. All Members, including ministers and shadow spokespersons who were allocated seats behind the frontbench, were asked to remain at their allocated seats when speaking.

Agreement for Members to contribute remotely

The [duty minister](#) then presented an [Agreement for Members to contribute remotely to parliamentary proceedings](#), covering the sittings until 2 September. Consistent with previous agreements, it allowed for Members unable to be physically present in the Chamber due to the pandemic to participate in proceedings through the official parliamentary video facility. During the fortnight 146 contributions were made by video link, by 41 Members.

No meetings of Federation Chamber

The Speaker initially advised that the Federation Chamber would not meet during the first sitting week, and on 4 August he updated this advice, announcing that the [Deputy Speaker](#) had set the next meeting of the Federation Chamber for Monday, 18 October at 10.30 am, unless an alternative day or hour were fixed.

Changes to the Speaker's panel

On 3 August, the Speaker presented a warrant removing the [Member for Lyne](#) from the Speaker's panel and adding the Members for [Gippsland](#), [Parkes](#) and [O'Connor](#). On 4 August, the Speaker presented a warrant to also add the [Member for Oxley](#) to the panel. Members of the Speaker's panel take the Chair (as Deputy Speaker) of the Chamber or Federation Chamber when asked to do so. In practice, rosters are maintained for occupants of the Chair. When in the Chair, Members of the Speaker's panel do not have a casting vote under section 40 of the Constitution unless specifically appointed Acting Speaker by resolution of the House.

Ministerial arrangements

Five ministers were absent this fortnight, as a result of COVID-19 related travel restrictions. Before Question Time on 3 and 9 August, the Prime Minister informed the House of revised ministerial arrangements for each week. Ministerial arrangements are announced in order to indicate to whom Members may direct questions relating to the portfolios of absent ministers.

National Library of Australia Council—resignation of member

On 3 August the Speaker informed the House that the [Member for Berowra](#), Mr Leeser, had resigned from the National Library of Australia Council. Under the [National Library Act 1960](#), the House elects a Member to serve on the Council, which is charged with conducting the affairs of the National Library, for a term of up to three years. The House has not yet elected a Member to serve on the Council in place of Mr Leeser.

Ministerial statement on Closing the Gap report

The [Prime Minister](#) presented the first [Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan](#) on 5 August and, by leave, made a statement relating to the report. This followed an agreement between Australian governments and Indigenous peak bodies to present a report mid-year, rather than in February as has been the case for the Closing the Gap statement in recent years. After the [Leader of the Opposition](#) made a statement in reply, the [Acting Leader of the House](#) moved that the House take note of the document, and debate was adjourned and made an order of the day for the next sitting. Debate resumed on 9 and 11 August, with 18 Members contributing, including the [Minister](#) and the [Shadow Minister](#), for Indigenous Australians.

Voting intentions of Members not present

On 9 and 12 August the [Manager of Opposition Business](#), by leave, presented documents received from the Members for [Clark](#) and [Warringah](#) which indicated how they would have voted during the sittings. Similar documents had been presented earlier during the pandemic when non-aligned Members who were unable to be present asked to have their voting intentions recorded.

Death of former Members announced

On 9 August the Speaker announced the death of [John Raymond Martyr](#), a former Member for Swan, and on 10 August announced the death of [Julian Howard Beale](#), a former Member for Deakin. On each occasion, as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased, all Members present rose in silence.

Private Members' business

After petitions were presented on 9 August, the Speaker informed the House that, pursuant to [standing order 110](#), the [Member for Hughes](#), Mr C. Kelly, had postponed his notice relating to the introduction of a private Member's bill. The notice, for the introduction of the Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Amendment Bill 2021, was subsequently returned to the [Notice Paper](#), as a notice given for 30 August 2021. The Speaker later notified the House that a notice in the name of the Member for Clark, Mr Wilkie, had also been postponed. The introduction of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Cleaning up Political Donations) Bill 2021 is set down for 18 October 2021. Standing order 110 permits Members who have given notice of motion, once they have notified the Clerk in writing and before the motion is called on, to change the terms of the motion, the day proposed for moving the motion, or withdraw the notice entirely. On this sitting, as the agreement for remote participation does not permit Members contributing by video link to move motions, standing order 110 was relied upon by Members who were unable to be present due to travel restrictions relating to COVID-19.

The [Selection Committee](#) determines the program of business for Monday mornings, which are set aside for petitions, committee and delegation business and private Members' business. The Selection Committee had [determined](#) that a minimum of two speakers could speak to the [Member for Paterson](#)'s motion in the time remaining before 12 noon on Monday, 9 August. The postponement of earlier items of private Members' business meant there was time for six Members to speak to the motion in the time available.

Motions moved on behalf of Members participating by video link

As Members participating by official video link were unable to move or second motions, several Members present in the Chamber noted that they were moving amendments on behalf of shadow ministers participating by video link. On 4 August, the [Member for Fenner](#), Dr Leigh, moved a second reading amendment that had been circulated in the name of the [Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education](#), the Member for Kingston, and the next day, during consideration in detail, moved two amendments circulated in the shadow minister's name. On 5 August, the [Member for Perth](#), Mr Gorman, noted that he was moving a second reading amendment on behalf of the [Shadow Minister for Resources](#), the Member for Brand. On 11 August, the [Member for Ballarat](#), Ms C. F. King, indicated that she was moving a second reading amendment on behalf of the [Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing](#), the Member for Hindmarsh. In each second reading debate, the shadow minister was considered to be the lead speaker for the Opposition and was allotted 30 minutes to speak under [standing order 1](#).

Motion by leave during Question Time

During Question Time on 10 August, the Leader of the Opposition was granted leave to move a motion calling on Members to refrain from spreading misinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The Prime Minister and the seconder—the [Member for Macarthur](#), Dr Frelander—spoke in favour of the motion, which was then carried on the voices.

Leave of absence granted to all Members

After Question Time on 12 August, the [Acting Leader of the House](#) moved that leave be granted to 'every Member of the House of Representatives from the determination of this sitting of the House to the date of its next sitting'. The question was carried on the voices. [Standing order 26](#) allows any Member granted a leave of absence to be excused from the service of the House or on any committee. This motion is typically moved to cover the absence of Members from the House between the main periods of sittings each year, to safeguard against inadvertent contravention of section 38 of the Constitution, which provides that a Member's place becomes vacant if he or she does not attend the House for two consecutive months. With increased risks and uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Leader of the House has, in recent times, moved that leave of absence be given to all Members on a more regular basis, in case a change to the sitting calendar becomes necessary between sittings.

Legislation

During the fortnight, 14 [bills were presented](#) (including three from the Senate) and 15 bills were passed by the House. On the first sitting day, the House was informed that the Governor-General had assented to 28 bills. This large number reflects the legislative program progressed by the Parliament during the latter part of the Winter sittings.

Introductions

Of the bills introduced, one was a private Member's bill and 13 were government bills. Subjects included: [financial support](#) for those affected by COVID-19 lockdowns; [overseas infrastructure investment](#); access to the [Child Dental Benefits Scheme](#); improved [visibility of superannuation assets](#) during family law proceedings; [counterterrorism financial sanction listings](#); [military discipline](#); and federal elections, the [operation of polling places](#), [registration of political parties](#), [political campaigners](#) and [electoral offences](#).

Passing the House

Of the 15 bills that passed the House, of significance is the [Treasury Laws Amendment \(COVID-19 Economic Response No. 2\) Bill 2021](#), presented by the [Assistant Treasurer](#), by leave. Exceptionally, the bill passed all stages in one day, with leave being granted for debate to continue immediately after the Assistant Treasurer's second reading speech, and for the third reading to be moved

immediately after the bill's second reading. Under [standing orders 139, 142 and 155](#), if leave were not granted at any of these stages, further proceedings would have taken place at a future sitting.

Matter of Public Importance discussions

Topics for the one-hour discussions after Question Time on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays included: COVID-19; climate change; and the establishment of a national anti-corruption commission.

Communication with the Senate

On 3 August, the Senate returned the [Water Legislation Amendment \(Inspector-General of Water Compliance and Other Measures\) Bill 2021](#), informing the House that it did not insist on its amendments that were disagreed to by the House on 24 June.

On 5 August, the Senate returned the [Treasury Laws Amendment \(COVID-19 Economic Response No. 2\) Bill 2021](#) with an amendment. The amendment was considered immediately and disagreed to, after debate. Reasons for disagreeing to the amendment were adopted. On 9 August a message was received from the Senate, informing the House that the Senate did not insist on its amendment.

On 10 August, the Senate returned the [Treasury Laws Amendment \(2021 Measures No. 1\) Bill 2021](#) with amendments. The amendments were considered immediately and agreed to, on division.

On 12 August, the Senate returned the [Family Assistance Legislation Amendment \(Child Care Subsidy\) Bill 2021](#) with a request for an amendment. Before the message was reported, a message from the Governor-General was announced, recommending an appropriation for the purpose of an amendment to be made on motion by a minister. The message from the Senate was considered immediately, and on motion moved by a minister the requested amendment was made, after debate. Later that day, the bill was again returned, this time with amendments. The House considered the amendments immediately, and agreed to the amendments, without debate.

Several Senate bills were transmitted for the concurrence of the House. On most occasions, the second reading was made an order of the day for a future sitting, on motion moved by a minister and agreed to without debate. On 9 August, a private Senator's bill, the [Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Amendment \(Waiver of Debt and Act of Grace Payments\) Bill 2019](#), was transmitted for concurrence of the House. After a minister moved for the bill to be considered at a future sitting, [Dr Chalmers](#) moved an amendment to enable the bill to be considered immediately. Following debate, the amendment was defeated on division. The minister's motion was then agreed to on the voices. The bill would subsequently be placed on the Notice Paper as an item of government business (see, for example, [order of the day no. 38](#) on 10 August).

The House and Senate are scheduled to meet next on 23 August.

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

[House of Representatives Standing Orders](#), as at 19 September 2019, as amended—the House rules of procedure