

HOUSE REVIEW



Selected features of House of Representatives business

Sitting held on 8 April 2020 (no. 28)

On 23 March the House agreed to a revised sitting calendar that provided for the next sitting to be on 11 August, but on 2 April the Speaker notified all Members setting 8 April as the alternative date for the next meeting. On 8 April, the focus of the House was on four bills to implement further elements of the Government's economic response to the coronavirus pandemic. The format for the day was similar to that of the sitting on 23 March.

Special arrangements for the operation of the Chamber

Special seating arrangements were again put in place to enable social distancing between Members. Fifty-nine Members were present, compared to 90 Members on 23 March. Pairing arrangements reduced the numbers during divisions, mitigating health risks. Several of the paired Members were in the Chamber at other times.

The press viewing gallery was closed, other than to a small number of photographers. Media representatives had access to the second-floor enclosed galleries. There was no access to the galleries, or to the Parliament building, for the general public.

Proceedings commenced, as usual, with the Speaker making an acknowledgement of country and reading prayers. He then reported messages from the Senate returning 14 bills which had passed at the previous sitting without amendment or requests, and three messages from the Governor-General notifying assent to 26 bills.

Suspension of standing orders to put a program in place for the day

The Leader of the House advised that he and the Manager of Opposition business had agreed an absolute majority was not required for the motion he would move to suspend standing orders and put in place a new program of business for the day. He thanked the Manager of Opposition business for assistance in settling the terms of the motion, which was ultimately carried on the voices after a short debate. At the previous sitting, standing orders were amended to allow for such motions to be carried by a simple majority of Members voting, if agreed by the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business, rather than otherwise requiring an absolute majority of 76 Members.

The resolution provided for a ministerial statement by the Prime Minister and response by the Leader of the Opposition; the Federation Chamber not to meet; and the business to be restricted to bills relating to the further economic response to the coronavirus crisis, Question Time, and any other business agreed between a Minister and the Manager of Opposition Business. Similar to arrangements on 23 March, the resolution provided for a truncated process to consider the bills.

Ministerial statement and reply—Coronavirus

The Prime Minister remarked that 'we gather again today in unusual circumstances, during extreme times, to consider extraordinary responses to the twin crises our nation faces—to our nation's health and to our economy.' He stated that the Government had 'responded with the biggest economic

lifeline in Australia's history', commenting that 'we will put before the Parliament our JobKeeper package.' The Leader of the Opposition responded that 'even though we have concerns about some elements of the package and would like to see it improved', the Opposition would support the legislation. He added that the Opposition wanted 'a speedy passage of the wage subsidies that will make a difference to people's lives' and would therefore not support any amendments not moved by the Opposition in the Senate.

Legislation

Coronavirus Economic Response Package

Messages from the Governor-General recommending appropriations for the purposes of two Appropriation bills (Nos. 5 and No. 6) 2019-2020, were announced.

The Treasurer introduced the Coronavirus Economic Response Package (Payments and Benefits) Bill 2020 and three related bills, including the two Appropriation bills. As foreshadowed by the Prime Minister, the package provided for the operation of the \$130 billion JobKeeper wage subsidy scheme. In the usual way, the Appropriation bills proposed appropriations from the Consolidated Revenue Fund for ordinary annual services of the Government (No. 5), and services that are not for the ordinary annual services of the Government (No. 6).

Following the Treasurer's second reading speech, 17 Members made contributions during the cognate debate. After Question Time, the Leader of the House also presented letters received from two non-aligned Members who, while refraining from attending, wished to have their views on the bills reported. The Shadow Treasurer moved an amendment to the question on the second reading and eight further Opposition amendments were moved to that proposed amendment. None of the amendments opposed the second reading. Debate continued until Question Time.

After Question Time, when consideration resumed, the Speaker proposed that the questions on the amendments be put in the form, 'that the amendment be disagreed to', which meant that Members might not need to move across the Chamber to vote. The questions were put and each was carried on division 29:24. On the original Opposition amendment, the Speaker put the question using what was once the usual form: 'That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question'. The question was carried on division and again a 'crossover' division was avoided. One question on the second reading of all bills was put and carried on the voices.

Consideration in detail proceeded in accordance with the resolution and the bills were taken as a whole. An Opposition amendment was considered and the question again put in the form 'that the amendment be disagreed to'. This question was carried on division. The question on the third reading was then put and carried on the voices. Messages from the Governor-General recommending appropriations in relation to the two coronavirus bills were reported.

Following presentation of committee reports, the House resolved, on motion by the Leader of the House, that leave of absence be given to every Member to the date of its next sitting. At 4.29 pm the House then suspended to wait for the Senate's consideration of the bills. The Senate passed the package of bills without amendment or requests. When proceedings were resumed at 10.51 pm, the Speaker immediately adjourned the House to a date and hour to be fixed, in accordance with the resolution agreed to earlier.

Question Time

As provided by the resolution, debate was interrupted at 2.00 pm and Question Time commenced as usual. The Prime Minister informed the House that, due to the current circumstances, nine Ministers would be absent from Question Time and that certain Ministers who would take questions on their

behalf. All but one question concerned the response to the coronavirus. A single point of order was taken.

Pairing arrangements

On indulgence, the Chief Government Whip followed by the Chief Opposition Whip read out the names of Members who were paired and thanked them for accommodating the social distancing requirements by refraining from attending. The Leader of the Australian Greens also spoke on indulgence to thank non-aligned Members who had not attended. The Speaker thanked the Whips and Leader of the Australian Greens and expressed his thanks to those Members who refrained from attending the sitting.

The House and Senate are scheduled to meet next on 11 August 2020.

Further information on the work of the House

[Bills and legislation](#), bills, explanatory memoranda, amendments, speeches, 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

[Votes and Proceedings](#), the official record of the proceedings of the House of Representatives

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

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