
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Balancing tradition and progress

Procedures for the opening of Parliament

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure

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Membership of the committee

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Terms of reference of the committee

To inquire into and report on the practices and procedures of the House generally with a view to making recommendations for their improvement or change and for the development of new procedures

Terms of reference of the inquiry

To inquire into the procedures of the House on the opening of a new Parliament, including but not restricted to:

- formal declaration of the opening of Parliament;
- swearing in of Members;
- election of Speaker and other office holders;
- presentation of Speaker to Governor-General;
- venue for the Governor-General's opening speech;
- other business to be conducted at the first sitting—

with particular attention to:

- the requirements of the Constitution;
- the preservation of an appropriate level of ceremony and tradition; and
- the need for Parliament to engage with the community it exists to serve.

The inquiry will include a review of the proposals put forward in the committee's 1995 report on procedures for the opening of Parliament.

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Preface

A committee of the House of Representatives, like the Standing Committee on Procedure, is a creature of the House. The House gives the committee certain powers to undertake inquiries on the House's behalf. At the end of an inquiry, the committee's main responsibility is to report to the House its conclusions and recommendations.

The Procedure Committee works within the specialised area of parliamentary practice and procedure. Until recently, it has presented its reports in the expectation that the prospective readers were well versed in these matters and that it was unnecessary to include more than essential background and contextual information.

The Parliament has long acknowledged an obligation to engage with the community it serves. Indeed this is one of the functions that parliamentary committees fulfil. However, the physical remoteness of Canberra from many Australians and the difficulties in distributing the documents which Parliament and its committees publish have left many citizens without an understanding of the vital part that the Parliament plays in their everyday lives.

New communications technologies can help to overcome this. Not every Australian has access to the Internet and the Parliament's site on the World Wide Web. But increasingly, the Parliament's publications are reaching more readers. The Procedure Committee is mindful of this and in recent reports—like *It's your House* and *The Second Chamber*—has attempted to engage a wider audience.

This report goes a little further. It has been deliberately prepared for a readership beyond the House of Representatives whose Members will ultimately determine the fate of its recommendations. The introductory chapters explain some of the historical and traditional aspects of the Parliament's opening ceremonies; these would be well known to any Member of Parliament. Nevertheless its main objective is to submit proposals for the House's consideration, not to educate.

Those who wish to know more about the opening of a new Parliament, or of parliamentary procedure and practice in general, are invited to consult *House of Representatives Practice*, the *Guide to Procedures* or the *Factsheet* series. Each is available at the House of Representatives website: www.aph.gov.au/house