



Parliament House and access to proceedings

THE PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Meetings in Melbourne and provisional Parliament House in Canberra

The first Commonwealth Parliament was opened in the Exhibition Building, Melbourne, on 9 May 1901 by the Duke of Cornwall and York, later King George V, the Constitution having provided that the Parliament would sit at Melbourne until it met at the seat of Government of the Commonwealth which was to be determined later by the Parliament.¹ The Commonwealth Parliament continued to meet in Melbourne for 26 years using the State's Parliament House.² The Parliament of Victoria met in the Exhibition Building during this period.³

The seat of Government which, under the Constitution, was to be in New South Wales but not within 100 miles of Sydney, was finally determined in 1908 to be in the Yass-Canberra district⁴ and the Federal Capital Territory came into being on 1 January 1911.⁵ In that year a competition for the design of the new capital took place and was won by the American architect Walter Burley Griffin. However, work on the capital progressed slowly. In July 1923 the House agreed to a motion requesting the Governor-General to summon the first meeting of the 10th (next) Parliament at Canberra.⁶ In the same month the House further resolved that a provisional building (with an estimated life of 50 years) be erected, rather than the nucleus of a permanent Parliament House.⁷ The first sod was turned on the site on 28 August 1923. The provisional building was the design of John Smith Murdoch, Chief Architect of the Department of Works and Railways and built by that Department. It was opened on 9 May 1927 by the Duke of York, later King George VI.

The Parliament met in the provisional Parliament House for 61 years. To accommodate Ministers and their staff and increases in the numbers of parliamentarians and staff the building was extended and altered over the years but nevertheless by 1988 it had been grossly overcrowded for a long period. A description of the provisional building is given in

1 Constitution, s. 125, VP 1901–02/1–9.

2 The two Houses met in Melbourne again on 9 and 10 May 2001, to mark the centenary of the first meetings, VP 1998–2001/1576, 2104 (resolutions of House); 2259–60 (joint meeting with Senate in Exhibition Building on 9 May); 2261–2 (sitting of House on 10 May in Victorian Legislative Assembly Chamber).

3 Between December 1902 and April 1903 the State Parliament met in Parliament House while the Commonwealth Parliament was prorogued.

4 *Seat of Government Act 1908*. The Act repealed the *Seat of Government Act 1904* which had determined an area near Dalgety. This choice however proved to be unacceptable to the Government of New South Wales and the matter was reconsidered. The results of the final ballots in each House were influenced by the State Government's indicated willingness to cede land in the Yass–Canberra district. H.R. Deb. (8.10.08) 936–40; S. Deb. (6.11.08) 2100–8. The land was ceded by the *Seat of Government Surrender Act 1909* (NSW).

5 By proclamation of the Governor-General pursuant to the *Seat of Government Acceptance Act 1909*. The agreement was later varied (to correct an error and make a survey adjustment) by the *Seat of Government Acceptance Act 1922*.

6 VP 1923–24/74; H.R. Deb. (28.6.23) 460–85, (12.7.23) 1048–61.

7 VP 1923–24/96; H.R. Deb. (26.7.23) 1668–78.

chapter 6 of the first edition. The last sitting at the provisional Parliament House took place on 3 June 1988.

The permanent Parliament House

A Joint Standing Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House, appointed in 1975 to act for and represent the Parliament as the client in the planning, design and construction of a new Parliament House, recommended that stage one of a new building be ready for occupation by the 1988 bicentenary of European settlement in Australia.⁸ On 28 August 1980 the House approved the construction on Capital Hill of a new and permanent Parliament House.⁹ The new Parliament House was opened on 9 May 1988 by Queen Elizabeth II. The first sittings in the new building took place on 22 August 1988.¹⁰

The layout of the building

The building occupies 7.5 hectares and has an area of some 240 000 square metres, covering four levels, including one below ground level. An 81 metre high flag mast rises over the centre of the building. The House of Representatives entrance is on the eastern side of the building.

The main public and ceremonial entry to Parliament House is from the forecourt through the Great Verandah and the Foyer. Directly beyond the Foyer is the Great Hall, the venue of parliamentary ceremonies and receptions, occasions of national significance and other functions. Beyond the Great Hall is the Members' Hall, centrally located between the Chambers and at the intersection of the north-south and east-west axes of the building.

Unlike the situation in many Parliaments following the Westminster model, Ministers' main offices are in Parliament House rather than in the principal buildings of the executive departments they administer. Originally an historical accident (a shortage of suitable office accommodation in Canberra when the provisional Parliament House was first occupied) the presence of substantial ministerial offices in Parliament House became the accepted practice over the years and was institutionalised in the new Parliament House, where offices for the Prime Minister, Ministers and ministerial staff and other government employees are consolidated into a clearly defined zone of the building with its own identity and entrance. Accommodation of the Canberra representatives of a number of media organisations within Parliament House has, for similar historical reasons, been officially accepted by the Parliament, despite the fact that much of the work of these persons and organisations does not relate directly to the proceedings of the Parliament.

Consistent with the concept of the building as a 'people's building' considerable attention has been given to providing facilities and services for visitors and tourists. A large proportion of the first floor is devoted to the public circulation system from which visitors have access to the galleries of the Great Hall, the Members' Hall and the Chambers. From the first floor the public also has access to the committee rooms, and to public facilities at the front of the building, comprising a theatre, exhibition area, post office and cafeteria. A book and souvenir shop is situated in the Foyer near the main entrance.

⁸ VP 1977/98; H.R. Deb. (3.5.77) 1445–6; PP 69 (1977).

⁹ VP 1978–80/1604; H.R. Deb. (28–29.8.80) 970–1.

¹⁰ More detail on the site, design, construction and layout of the building is given in previous editions (4th edn, pp. 106–8).

THE CHAMBER

The Chamber, like the Chamber of the British House of Commons and the Chamber of the provisional Parliament House, is furnished predominantly in green. The derivation of the traditional use of green is uncertain.¹¹ The shades of green selected for the new Chamber were chosen as representing the tones of native eucalypts.

Facing the main Chamber entrance from the Members' Hall is the Speaker's Chair and the Table of the House of Representatives.¹² High on the Chamber wall above the Speaker's Chair is the Australian Coat of Arms. Four Australian national flags are mounted from the ceiling in each corner of the Chamber, and an additional two flags flank the main entrance.

Immediately in front of the Speaker's Chair are chairs for the Clerk of the House and the Deputy Clerk. Set into the Clerk's desk is a button which enables the division bells to be activated with associated flashing green lights in rooms and lobbies of the building. A similar system operates from the Senate using red lights. The bells are rung for five minutes before the time fixed for the commencement of each sitting¹³ and before the time fixed for the resumption of a sitting after a suspension. Before any division or ballot is taken, the Clerk rings the bells for the period specified by standing order, as indicated by the sandglasses kept on the Table for that purpose.¹⁴ For most divisions a four-minute sandglass is used; a one-minute sandglass is used when successive divisions are taken and there is no intervening debate after the first division.¹⁵ The bells are also rung to summon Members to the Chamber for the purpose of establishing a quorum.¹⁶

Electronic speech timing clocks are set on the walls below each side gallery. The hand is moved by remote control by the Deputy Clerk to indicate the number of minutes allowed for a speech.¹⁷ The clocks automatically return anti-clockwise to zero. A small amber warning light is illuminated on each clock face one minute before the time for the speech expires.

Microphones in the Chamber are used for the broadcast and telecast of the proceedings of the House and for sound reinforcement purposes. The broadcast announcements are made from a booth at the back of the Chamber. Control of the broadcast also occurs there with the control of the telecast taking place in a basement production control room. Amplifiers are provided in the Chamber in order that speeches may be heard by Members. The Chamber floor is equipped with facilities for hearing-impaired persons wearing hearing aids. Only the microphone of the Speaker is live all the time. The nearest microphone to a Member is switched on when he or she is making a speech. Proceedings of both Houses are relayed to rooms throughout the building.

11 J. M. Davies, 'Red and Green', *The Table* XXXVII, 1968, p. 33.

12 The original Speaker's Chair, described in detail in the first edition, remained in its place in the provisional building.

13 S.O. 54.

14 S.O.s 129(a), 136(b).

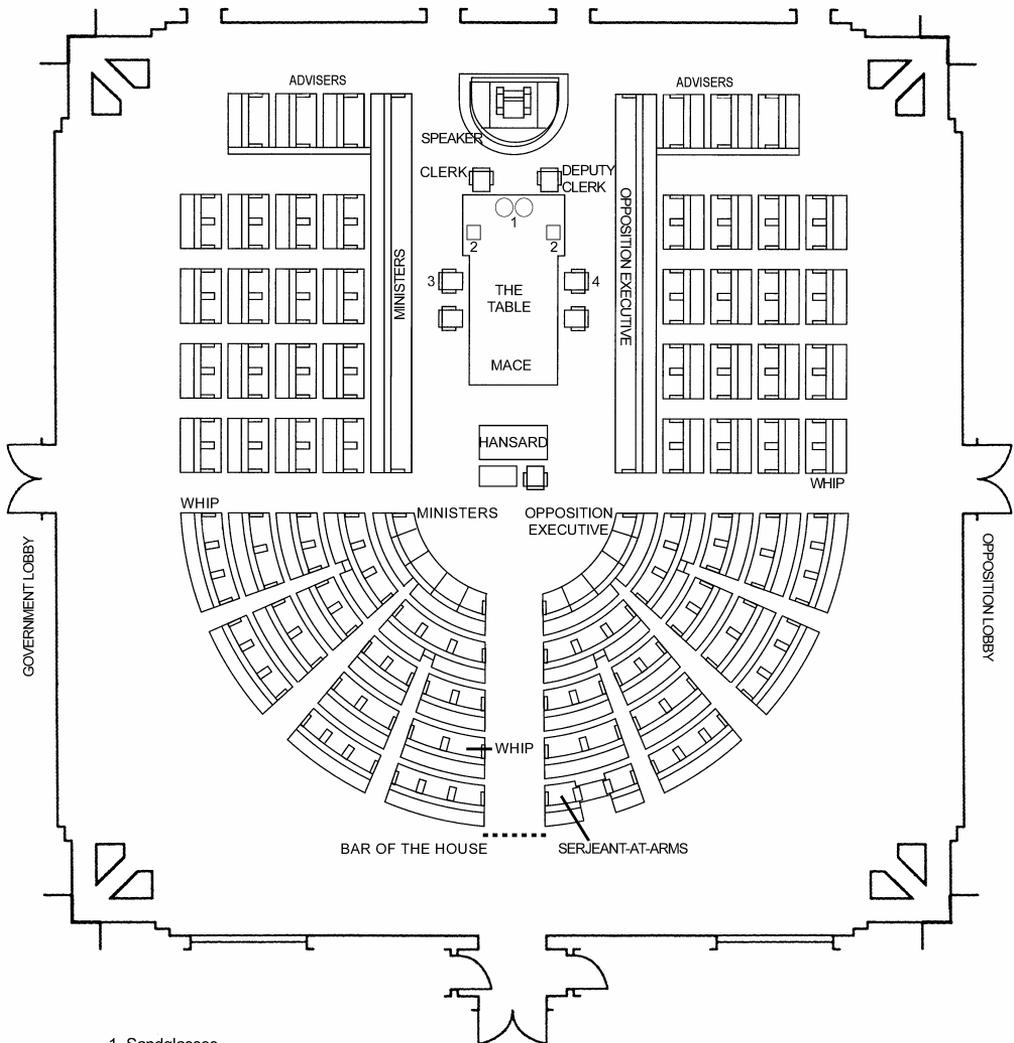
15 S.O. 131(a).

16 S.O. 56(a).

17 S.O. 1 (time limits for speeches).

The House of Representatives Chamber

Plan for the 41st Parliament



1. Sandglasses
2. Despatch Boxes
3. Prime Minister or Minister in charge of business
4. Leader of the Opposition or Member of the Opposition Executive

In 1968 a proposal to install an indicator panel in the Chamber in the provisional building which would display the name and electoral division of the Member speaking was considered by the Speaker but was not proceeded with. The installation of an electronic voting system has been considered from time to time. Necessary conduits have been provided, and Members' desks have been designed so that control switches can be installed should a decision be taken by the House to install electronic voting in the future. Connections to the parliamentary computer network are provided to each desk and at the Table for Members' laptop computers.

Two despatch boxes, with elaborate silver and enamel decorations, are situated on the Table in front of the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, respectively. These were a gift from King George V to mark the opening of the provisional Parliament House in Canberra in 1927 and the inauguration of the sittings of the Parliament in the national capital.¹⁸ The despatch boxes, which are purely ornamental, are exact replicas of those which lay on the Table at Westminster prior to their loss when the Commons Chamber was destroyed by bombs in 1941. They are a continuing link between the House of Commons and the House of Representatives. The Prime Minister, Ministers and members of the opposition executive speak 'from the despatch box'. The origin of the boxes is obscure, the most accepted theory being that in early times Ministers, Members and the Clerk of the House of Commons carried their papers in a box and, thus, one or more boxes were generally deposited on the Table.

The Chamber of the House of Representatives is used only by the House itself, for some joint meetings or sittings of the House and Senate, and for the occasional major international parliamentary conference.

The Mace

A mace was originally a weapon of war similar to a club. During the 12th century the Serjeants-at-Arms of the King's bodyguard were equipped with maces, and over time the Serjeants' maces, stamped on the butt with the Royal Arms, developed from their original function as weapons to being symbols of the King's authority. Towards the end of the 14th century Royal Serjeants-at-Arms were assigned to duties in the House of Commons. The powers of arrest of the Royal Serjeants came to be identified as the powers of arrest of the House of Commons.

This authority may be said to have formed the basis of the power of enforcement of parliamentary privilege and as its exercise had depended in the first instance on the powers vested in a Royal Serjeant-at-Arms, the Mace, which was his emblem of office, became identified with the growing privileges of the House of Commons and was recognised as the symbol of the authority of the House and hence the authority of the Speaker.

Since the end of the 17th century it has been accepted that the Mace must be brought into the Chamber before the House of Commons can be considered properly constituted. There was no such acceptance in respect of the first Mace used by the House of Representatives (*see below*).

The House of Representatives adopted the House of Commons' practice of using a Mace on the first sitting day of the Commonwealth Parliament on 9 May 1901. Current standing orders require that, once the newly elected Speaker has taken the Chair, the Mace, which

¹⁸ VP 1926–28/349.

until then remains under the Table, is placed on the Table.¹⁹ This is the only mention of the Mace in the standing orders. In practice the Mace is placed on the Table by the Serjeant-at-Arms when the Speaker takes the Chair at the commencement of each sitting and it remains there until the Speaker leaves the Chair at the adjournment of the sitting. The Mace remains on the Table if the sitting is suspended for a short time, but the current practice is for it to be removed during an overnight suspension.

The Mace used by the House of Representatives from 1901 to 1951 was lent to the House of Representatives by the Victorian Legislative Assembly. The current Mace was presented to the House of Representatives, at the direction of King George VI, by a delegation from the House of Commons on 29 November 1951 to mark the Jubilee of the Commonwealth Parliament,²⁰ and was, by Australian request, designed to resemble the Mace in use in the House of Commons. It is made from heavily gilded silver and embodies much symbolic ornamentation, including symbols of the Australian Commonwealth and States and numerous devices which illustrate Australian achievement.²¹

The Mace traditionally accompanies the Speaker on formal occasions, such as his or her presentation to the Governor-General after election, when the House goes to hear the Governor-General's speech opening Parliament, and on the presentation of the Address in Reply to the Governor-General at Government House. As the Mace is also a symbol of royal authority, it is not taken into the presence of the Crown's representative on these occasions but is left outside and covered with a green cloth, the symbol being considered unnecessary in the presence of the actual authority. When the Queen arrived to open Parliament in 1954, 1974 and 1977 she was met on the front steps of the provisional Parliament House by the Speaker. The Serjeant-at-Arms, accompanying the Speaker, did not carry the Mace on these occasions.²²

It is normal practice for the Mace to be used when the House of Representatives is sitting. However it was not considered essential for the Mace to be on the Table for the House to be properly constituted during the period when the Mace lent by the Victorian Legislative Assembly was in use, and during this time there were periods (1911–13, 1914–17, 1929–31) when the Mace was removed from the Chamber completely (on the instructions of the Speaker).

Seating

The Chamber is designed to seat up to 172 Members with provision for an ultimate total of 240 to be accommodated. Should additional seats be required, for example, as in the case of a joint sitting or joint meeting of the two Houses, temporary seating can be added around the Chamber perimeter. Seats are also provided on the floor of the Chamber for the Serjeant-at-Arms and for a number of government and opposition officials and advisers.²³ The Chamber has a horseshoe shaped seating arrangement. It therefore differs from many other legislative chambers which provide for their members to sit either on opposite sides of the room directly facing one another or in seats arranged in a fan-shaped design around a central dais or rostrum.

19 S.O. 12(c).

20 H.R. Deb. (29.11.51) 3091.

21 For a detailed description of the House of Representatives' Mace and the history of its use see A. R. Browning, *The Mace*. AGPS, Canberra, 1970.

22 Browning, *The Mace*, p. 12.

23 Senators have been seated in the seats reserved for officials, e.g. H.R. Deb. (16.12.92) 3918.

Members of the governing party or parties sit on the right of the Chair and the Members of the Opposition on the left. The two chairs on the right of the Table are, by practice, reserved for the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister but are also occupied by other Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries when they are in charge of the business before the House. Similarly, the two chairs on the left of the Table are reserved for the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition but may be occupied by Members leading for the Opposition in the business before the House. The separate small table and two seats at the end of the main Table are used by Hansard reporters. The front benches on the right hand of the Speaker are reserved for Ministers.²⁴ Members of the opposition executive sit on the front benches on the Speaker's left. Other Members have allotted seats. Standing order 24 allows Members to retain the seats they occupied at the end of the previous Parliament unless there has been a change of government. Any question arising regarding the seats to be occupied by Members is determined by the Speaker.²⁵

At floor level, at the right and the left of the rear of the Chamber, there are seats for visitors to which access is by invitation of the Speaker only. Seats are also provided for Senators, although a larger number of seats are available for them in the central first floor gallery (*see* p. 112).

Bar of the House

Situated at the back row of Members' seats at the point of entry to the Chamber from the main entrance facing the Speaker's Chair is the Bar of the House, consisting of a cylindrical bronze rail which can be lowered across the entrance. It is a point outside which no Member may speak to the House or over which no visitor may cross and enter the Chamber unless invited by the House. In parliamentary history, the Bar is the place to which persons are brought in order that the Speaker may address them on behalf of the House or at which they are orally examined.

A witness before the House is examined at the Bar unless the House otherwise orders.²⁶ In theory a person may be brought to the Bar of the House to receive thanks, to provide information or documents, to answer charges or to receive punishment. Neither the standing orders nor the practice of the House allow an organisation or a person as of right to be heard at the Bar.

The only occasion when persons have appeared at the Bar of the House of Representatives was in 1955 when Mr Raymond Fitzpatrick and Mr Frank Browne, having been adjudged by the House to be guilty of a serious breach of privilege, were ordered to attend at the Bar. On 10 June 1955 accompanied by the Serjeant-at-Arms each of them was heard separately at the Bar 'in extenuation of his offence' and later that day, again accompanied by the Serjeant-at-Arms bearing the Mace, appeared and received sentences of imprisonment for three months.²⁷ During the examination of Mr Browne, who addressed the House at length, the Speaker ordered him to take his hands off the Bar.²⁸

In 1921 the Prime Minister put forward a proposal that the House grant leave to a Senate Minister to address the House on the administration of his Department and that he

24 S.O. 23.

25 S.O. 24(b). H.R. Deb. (30.8.2000) 19666–7.

26 S.O. 255(b).

27 VP 1954–55/269–71. For full details of this case *see* Ch. on 'Parliamentary privilege'.

28 H.R. Deb. (10.6.55) 1625.

be heard from the floor of the House. The point was then made that, if the proposal was agreed to, the Senator should address the House from the Bar. The Speaker stated:

. . . I know no authority whatsoever which will permit anyone who is not a member of this Chamber to address honourable members from the floor of the House. It is competent for anyone, with the permission of honourable members, to address the House from the Bar . . .²⁹

Following debate on the matter the Prime Minister did not proceed with the proposal. On two occasions proposals that persons be brought or called to the Bar have been unsuccessful.³⁰

A number of witnesses have appeared before the Senate, some at the Bar and some being admitted into the Chamber.³¹

Galleries

There are open galleries on all four sides of the Chamber on the first floor from which proceedings can be observed. The gallery facing the Speaker's Chair and the side galleries are visitors' galleries which can seat 528 persons. There is also special provision for handicapped persons to be accommodated. The seats in the first row of the central gallery are known as the Special Visitors' Gallery, and are reserved for special visitors and diplomats. The seats in the second and third rows of the central gallery are known as the Speaker's Gallery. Apart from the four seats in the front row on the right hand side (viewed from the Speaker's Chair) which are reserved for Senators, the Speaker alone has the privilege of admitting visitors (although in practice Members make bookings through the Speaker's office for guests in this gallery). The remainder of the seats in the three visitors' galleries form the public galleries. Members of the public are able to obtain admission cards to the public galleries from the booking office in the Members' Hall or by booking through the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office. Members may book seats in the central gallery for their guests.

Admission to the galleries is a privilege extended by the House and people attending must conform with established forms of behaviour and, for security reasons, are subject to certain conditions of entry (*see* p. 127). People visiting the House are presumed to do so to listen to debates, and it is considered discourteous for them not to give their full attention to the proceedings. Thus, visitors are required to be silent and to refrain from attempting to address the House, interjecting, applauding, conversing, reading, eating, and so on.³² An earlier prohibition on note-taking in the public galleries was lifted in 1992. Visitors are not permitted to take photographs in the Chamber when the House is sitting nor are they allowed to display signs or banners.³³ Successive Speakers of the House have upheld these rules.

The Press Gallery, seating 102 persons, is located behind the Speaker's Chair. This gallery may be used only by journalists with Press Gallery passes. It is the Presiding Officers' right to control access to Parliament House by representatives of the media. This point was reiterated in the House in 1980 when members of the Press Gallery, in the context of an industrial dispute involving journalists, declared certain journalists not to be

29 H.R. Deb. (2.12.21) 13585.

30 VP 1967-68/308; VP 1970-72/465; H.R. Deb. (9.3.71) 689-92.

31 *See Odgers*, 6th edn, pp. 817-8, 878-9, 850-4.

32 H.R. Deb. (14.5.52) 324; H.R. Deb. (21.4.55) 79; H.R. Deb. (14.5.69) 1748; H.R. Deb. (6.4.2000) 15453; H.R. Deb. (27.5.2003) 15038; H.R. Deb. (1.4.2004) 27990-91. And see 'Disorder and disturbances' at p. 127.

33 H.R. Deb. (20.5.75) 2513.

members of the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery and asked for their passes to be withdrawn. The Speaker stated that he held the view that the democratic process required that the House be available for observation by all who could fit into the public galleries and by all who could come into the media gallery for the purpose of reporting its proceedings: under no circumstances would he take action to prevent any media representative whom he judged to be qualified and competent to report the proceedings of the House from coming there to report them.³⁴ Misconduct by members of the Press Gallery has resulted in passes being withdrawn.³⁵ For example, in 1971 a serious disturbance was caused by a journalist who interjected from the Press Gallery with the words ‘you liar’ while the Prime Minister was speaking. The Leader of the Opposition later moved for the suspension of standing orders to enable him to move a motion to bring the offender before the Bar. The Prime Minister having received an apology, the motion was withdrawn. The Speaker stated that he had ordered the journalist’s removal from the Press Gallery and the withdrawal of his pass. The Speaker later reported that he had received a letter from the journalist apologising for his conduct and that his pass had been restored.³⁶

Breaches of the rules by media personnel outside the Chamber may also lead to the withdrawal of press passes (*see p. 122*).

At second floor level on the three sides of the Chamber above the visitors’ galleries are enclosed soundproof galleries which can seat some 150 people. These galleries enable the operations of the Chamber to be described to visitors without disturbing the proceedings, and are mainly used by school groups.

Strangers and visitors

‘Stranger’ was the term traditionally given to any person present in the Chamber or the Main Committee who was neither a Member nor an employee of the House of Representatives performing official duties. Staff of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff, as employees of the Parliament, were not normally regarded as strangers (*but see below*).

On three occasions during World War II strangers were ordered to withdraw³⁷ to enable the House to discuss in private certain matters connected with the war. On one of these occasions the Speaker ruled that Senators would be regarded as strangers but that the House could invite them to remain and a motion that Senators be invited to remain was agreed to. The Speaker then informed the House that members of the official reporting staff were not covered by the resolution excluding strangers, whereupon a motion was moved and agreed to ‘That officers of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff withdraw’, and the recording of the debate was suspended.³⁸ On an earlier occasion in committee, the Chairman of Committees stated that he did not regard Senators as strangers.³⁹ In the past the question ‘That strangers be ordered to withdraw’ was frequently put to the House as a delaying or disruptive tactic.⁴⁰

34 H.R. Deb. (14.5.80) 2694.

35 H.R. Deb. (23.4.31) 1274; J 1940–43/211; H.R. Deb. (3.6.42) 2187; H.R. Deb. (29.5.73) 2738. For more recent comment by the Speaker on the use of the Press Gallery *see* H.R. Deb. (13.5.80) 2693–4.

36 VP 1970–72/465, 467; H.R. Deb. (9.3.71) 687, 689–92, 739.

37 VP 1940–43/72, 123, 166; H.R. Deb. (29.5.41) 55; H.R. Deb. (20.8.41) 11–12.

38 VP 1940–43/166; H.R. Deb. (20.8.41) 12–14.

39 VP 1940–43/72.

40 Pursuant to former S.O. 314.

On 28 July 1920 a large number of people gathered outside Parliament House, Melbourne. The Deputy Speaker, in the absence of the Speaker, issued an instruction that, while there was any probability of a disturbance outside, all strangers should be excluded from the galleries of the Chamber.⁴¹

During World War II joint secret meetings of Members and Senators were held in the House of Representatives Chamber and strangers were not permitted to attend, although certain departmental heads were present. The Clerks and the Serjeant-at-Arms remained in the Chamber.⁴²

While the House or the Main Committee is sitting no Member may bring a visitor into that part of the Chamber or that part of the room where the Main Committee is meeting which is reserved for Members.⁴³

In 1920 the Senate proposed a change in the standing orders of both Houses to enable a Minister of either House to attend the other House to explain and pilot through any bill of which he had charge in his own House.⁴⁴ The proposal lapsed at prorogation in 1922 without having been considered by the House of Representatives.

In 1974 the Standing Orders Committee recommended that, subject to the concurrence of the Senate, and for a trial period, Ministers of both Houses be rostered to attend the other House for the purpose of answering questions without notice.⁴⁵ The House was dissolved without the report having been considered.

In 1982 the matter of the attendance of Senate Ministers to answer questions in the House was referred to the Standing Orders Committee,⁴⁶ but the committee did not report before the 32nd Parliament was dissolved. In 1986 the Standing Committee on Procedure considered the rostering of Ministers between the Houses during its inquiry into the rules and practices which govern the conduct of question time. In its report⁴⁷ the committee stated that it did not support the proposal, being of the opinion that all Ministers should be Members of and responsible to the House of Representatives. The committee noted that the standing orders and practices of both Houses had complementary provisions for Members and Senators to appear before the other House or its committees as witnesses but stated its belief that, as far as the accountability of Ministers at question time was concerned, Ministers who were Members of the House should be responsible to the Parliament and the people through the House of Representatives only.

Distinguished visitors

Distinguished visitors to the House, such as parliamentary delegations, may be invited by the Speaker to be seated at the rear of the Chamber on seats provided for such visitors, or in the special visitors' gallery or the Speaker's Gallery. When such visitors are present Speakers have sometimes adopted the practice of interrupting the proceedings and informing Members of the presence of the visitors, who are then welcomed by the Chair on behalf of the House.⁴⁸

41 H.R. Deb. (29.7.20) 3078–9.

42 VP 1940–43/275, 393, 441.

43 S.O. 257(b).

44 VP 1920–21/163.

45 Standing Orders Committee, *Report*, PP 63 (1974) 5–6.

46 VP 1980–83/748.

47 PP 354 (1986) 25.

48 E.g. VP 1970–72/81; VP 1974–75/405, 900 (Chairman); VP 1976–77/348, 386, 405, 484; H.R. Deb. (1.11.2000) 21854.

Other distinguished visitors, such as foreign heads of State or Government and visiting Presiding Officers, may be invited by the Speaker to take a seat on the floor of the House.⁴⁹ Such an invitation is regarded as a rare and high honour. It is customary for the Speaker to exercise this right only after formally seeking the concurrence of Members. The practice on these occasions is for the Speaker to inform the House that the visitor was within the precincts and, with the concurrence of Members, to invite the visitor to take a seat on the floor. The Serjeant-at-Arms escorts the visitor to a chair provided immediately to the right of the Speaker's Chair. A private citizen, Captain Herbert Hinkler, a highly distinguished Australian aviator, was accorded the honour in 1928 after his record breaking flight from England to Australia.⁵⁰ The only other recorded invitation to a private citizen was in 1973 when the Australian writer, Patrick White, who had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, was invited to take a seat on the floor of the House in recognition of his achievement. Mr White wrote to the Speaker declining the invitation.⁵¹

Only once⁵² have visitors been invited to address the House from the floor. On 29 November 1951 a delegation from the House of Commons presented a new Mace to the House to mark the Jubilee of the Commonwealth Parliament. The Speaker, with the concurrence of Members, directed that the delegation, which consisted of three Members and a Clerk, be invited to enter the Chamber and be received at the Table. Members of the delegation were provided with seats on the floor of the House at the foot of the Table. The Speaker welcomed the visitors and invited members of the delegation to address the House. The Mace was presented by the delegation and was laid on the Table. The Speaker acknowledged the gift and the Prime Minister moved a motion of thanks which was supported by the Leader of the Opposition, and agreed to by all Members present rising in their places. The delegation then withdrew from the Chamber.⁵³

Formal meetings of both Houses, in the House of Representatives Chamber, have been addressed by Presidents of the United States of America and China.⁵⁴

The Main Committee chamber

The Main Committee meets in the largest of the House of Representatives committee rooms on the second floor of Parliament House. This room has been dedicated to its role and is fitted out in a small-scale chamber setting. Like the Chamber of the House the Main Committee has a horseshoe shaped seating configuration.⁵⁵ Members do not have fixed seats, but in practice government and opposition Members sit on the right and left of the Chair respectively. There are galleries (at floor level) for advisers, the media and the public. Proceedings are televised on the House monitoring system.

49 S.O. 257(a); e.g. VP 1970–72/31, 187, 351, 380, 1207; VP 1978–80/91; VP 1985–87/1073; VP 1990–93/703; VP 1996–98/1871; VP 2002–04/1653.

50 VP 1926–28/512.

51 H.R. Deb. (7.11.73) 2882; H.R. Deb. (29.11.73) 4081.

52 General D. MacArthur is sometimes reported as having addressed the House during World War II. The general was invited to take a seat on the floor of the House on 26.3.42, VP 1940–43/307. He addressed members of the Parliament on the same day outside the Chamber.

53 VP 1951–53/242; H.R. Deb. (29.11.51) 3088–93.

54 VP 1990–92/1305, VP 1996–98/841, VP 2002–2004/1275 (US); VP 2002–2004/1279 (China). See Ch. on 'Order of business and the sitting day'.

55 Seating is provided for 38 Members, and there is room for additional seating if required.

In 2000 the Procedure Committee recommended that the name of the Main Committee be changed to ‘Second Chamber’ and that it be relocated adjacent to the Chamber.⁵⁶ In 2004 the committee again pressed for a purpose-built venue, recommending the name ‘Federation Chamber’.⁵⁷

ACCESS TO PROCEEDINGS

Parliament conducts its business, with the rarest exceptions, in public. This is now taken for granted but it has not always been the case over the long history of Parliament. In the 18th century the House of Commons declared the publication of any of its debates a breach of privilege and exercised its power to imprison those who committed such breaches. The House of Commons at first was seeking, among other things, to maintain its independence by keeping its debates secret from the monarch. By the 18th century its motive was possibly reluctance to be held accountable to public opinion. It also had cause for concern because of the notorious inaccuracy of reports of its debates which were based on notes taken by reporters, contrary to the orders of the House. However, reports persisted and by the end of the 18th century they were openly tolerated.⁵⁸

Visitors (until recently referred to as ‘strangers’) have been ordered to leave the House of Representatives on special occasions, the last occasion being in 1942. The use of the word ‘stranger’ to describe people within the parliamentary precincts who are not Members or staff of the Parliament is commented on by Wilding and Laundry:

The official use of the word ‘stranger’ is yet another symbol of the ancient privileges of Parliament, implying as it does the distinction between a member and a non-member and the fact that an outsider is permitted within the confines of the Palace of Westminster on tolerance only and not by right.⁵⁹

People may view the proceedings of the House from the public galleries (*see* p. 112). Many thousands of people visit the House of Representatives public galleries during the sittings each year.⁶⁰

Of varying importance in informing the public of events in the House are:

- radio and television coverage of parliamentary proceedings;
- reports by the media;
- Hansard reports, the Votes and Proceedings, the Notice Paper and other documents of the House;⁶¹ and
- the Internet.

56 Standing Committee on Procedure, *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, PP 158 (2000) 33–5. The name of the House of Representatives Main Committee originated in the term ‘Main Legislation Committee’. This became ‘Main Committee (Legislation)’ in the October 1993 Procedure Committee report *About time: bills, questions and working hours*, which recommended the concept of parallel legislative streams. ‘Legislation’ was dropped from the name before the Main Committee’s establishment in 1994, when committee and delegation reports and motions to take note of papers were included as matters that could be referred.

57 Standing Committee on Procedure, *Renaming the Main Committee—Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Main Committee*, June 2004. The committee’s concern about the name reflected the possible confusion with the Parliament House main committee room, use of which is shared by the Senate and the House.

58 Lord Campion, *An introduction to the procedure of the House of Commons*, 3rd edn, Macmillan, London, 1958, p. 96; *see also* A. Wright and P. Smith, *Parliament past and present*, Hutchinson, London, 1903, pp. 221–30.

59 N. Wilding and P. Laundry, *An encyclopaedia of Parliament*, 4th edn, Cassell, London, 1972, p. 729.

60 It is considered that a large majority of visitors would have been tourists making single visits to the galleries.

61 *See* Ch. on ‘Documents’ for details of these documents as a source of information and their availability.

Broadcasting of proceedings

Televising

Access to the proceedings of the House for televising has been permitted since 1991.⁶² At the commencement of the 38th Parliament the House agreed to the following conditions in respect of the live broadcast and re-broadcast of the proceedings and excerpts of proceedings of the House, and of the Main Committee:⁶³

Access to the proceedings of the House of Representatives and its Main Committee for the recording and broadcasting of proceedings is subject to an undertaking to observe, and to comply with, the following conditions:

- (1) Broadcasting and recordings may only be made from the official and dedicated composite vision and sound feed provided by the Sound and Vision Office (channels 1 and 5 on the House Monitoring System);
- (2) Broadcasts shall be used only for the purposes of fair and accurate reports of proceedings, and shall not be used for:
 - (a) political party advertising or election campaigns;
 - (b) satire or ridicule; or
 - (c) commercial sponsorship or commercial advertising;
- (3) Reports of proceedings shall be such as to provide a balanced presentation of differing views;
- (4) Excerpts of proceedings which are subsequently withdrawn may be rebroadcast only if the withdrawal also is rebroadcast;
- (5) The instructions of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, or the Speaker's delegate, in respect of broadcasting, shall be observed.⁶⁴

The House has further provided that non-compliance with the guidelines may incur penalties. House members of the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings are able to consider breaches, and the House has set as a general guide to the penalties which may be imposed on stations or programs: first breach—access to the broadcast to be withdrawn for three sitting days; second breach—access to be withdrawn for six sitting days; and third or subsequent breaches—such penalty as is determined by the House members of the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings.⁶⁵ Access has been withdrawn for a breach of the conditions.⁶⁶

The composite vision and sound feed provided to networks must be produced in conformity with guidelines set for the parliamentary camera operators. The key requirements of the guidelines are that, as a general principle, cameras should focus on the Member with the call, with shots no closer than 'head and shoulders'. Wide angle shots of the Chamber may be used during divisions and Question Time, and sparing use may be made of such shots at other times. Reaction shots of a Member are permitted when the Member is referred to in debate or when the Member has sought information which is being provided. Coverage of the galleries is not permitted, with the exception of visiting dignitaries at the time they are welcomed on behalf of the House by the Speaker. In the event of unparliamentary behaviour or a disturbance by visitors on the floor of the Chamber, the camera must focus on the Chair.

⁶² Access was originally for a trial period, VP 1990–92/491–2; *see also* VP 1990–92/1084–5 (continuing approval), VP 1993–95/387–9 (modification by House of alterations proposed by Standing Committee on the Televising of the House of Representatives).

⁶³ The House allowed access to Main Committee proceedings from May 1996, VP 1996–98/42–3.

⁶⁴ VP 1996–98/42–3.

⁶⁵ VP 1996–98/42–3.

⁶⁶ VP 1990–92/1437 (penalty determined by (then) Committee on Televising, but House informed).

The televised proceedings of the House and the Main Committee, as well as some of the public hearings of parliamentary committees, are broadcast live over the Internet,⁶⁷ Sky News and TransACT.

Radio broadcasts

The radio broadcasting of the proceedings commenced on 10 July 1946 in the House of Representatives. The Parliament of Australia was the second national Parliament of the Commonwealth to introduce the broadcasting of its proceedings, the radio broadcast of proceedings in New Zealand having commenced in 1936.

Compulsory radio broadcasts are made and controlled under the *Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act 1946*, which directs the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to broadcast the proceedings of the House of Representatives or the Senate, or of a joint sitting pursuant to section 57 of the Constitution. Since November 1988 the broadcast has been made on a network established to carry the broadcast of proceedings and related material only.⁶⁸

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE BROADCASTING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

A Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings is appointed in each Parliament pursuant to the *Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act 1946*. The Act provides for the committee to:

- consider and specify in a report to each House the general principles upon which there should be determined the days upon which, and the periods during which, the proceedings of the Senate and the House should be broadcast;
- determine the days upon which, and the periods during which, the proceedings of either House should be broadcast, in accordance with the general principles specified by the committee and adopted by each House; and
- determine the days upon which, and the periods during which, the proceedings of a joint sitting should be broadcast.

The committee has the power to make such arrangements as it thinks fit for the permanent safe keeping of recordings of proceedings in either House which are considered to be of sufficient historic interest. The committee also determines the conditions in accordance with which a re-broadcast may be made of any portion of the proceedings of either House.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The general principles recognise that over time the coverage of each House will be approximately equal. They also provide that, at the conclusion of the broadcast of live proceedings each day, the recording of Question Time from the House whose proceedings were not broadcast live shall be broadcast. Where a Member makes a personal explanation in rebuttal of a misrepresentation in a question or an answer, the question and answer are excluded from the re-broadcast.

The principles allow the Broadcasting Committee, in making determinations, to take into account the importance of an impending debate and the public interest attaching to it, and

⁶⁷ Accessible through the Parliament's internet site at <http://www.aph.gov.au/>

⁶⁸ Formerly the Parliamentary and News Network (PNN), now called NewsRadio.

the committee may depart from the principles in order to meet any unusual or special circumstances.⁶⁹

STANDING DETERMINATIONS

Standing determinations of the Broadcasting Committee in force at the time of publication include the following:

- *Allocation of broadcasts between the Houses*: unless the committee or a subcommittee decides otherwise (because of the significance of a particular debate), the allocation is as follows:
 - Monday—House of Representatives
 - Tuesday—Senate
 - Wednesday—Senate
 - Thursday—House of Representatives
 - Friday—House of Representatives.

If the Houses sit on a weekend, on Saturday the broadcast is from the Senate and on Sunday from the House.

- *Transfer of broadcast*: when proceedings of the House allocated to be broadcast on a day conclude, the broadcast may be transferred to the other House; similarly if the House not allocated for broadcast meets before the allocated House, the proceedings of the House not allocated may be broadcast until proceedings in the allocated House commence.
- *Announcements from the control booth*: announcements from the control booth are limited to relevant particulars of the Member/Senator speaking and the names of Members/Senators scheduled to speak; to descriptions of procedure and business before either House; general information about debates or proceedings is permitted, provided political views or forecasts are not included.

RE-BROADCASTS

No re-broadcast may be made otherwise than in accordance with the conditions determined by the Broadcasting Committee. As any re-broadcast or delayed broadcast of a selected part of proceedings is ordinarily of relatively short duration, the committee is conscious of a possible partisan or partial presentation. Accordingly, re-broadcasting or delayed broadcasting is traditionally strictly curbed. The only official re-broadcasts, as such, which take place are those of the Governor-General's speech at the opening of each session of the Parliament, occasionally part of Question Time and, on days when only one House is sitting, a re-broadcast of Question Time originally broadcast earlier in the day.

Although the term 're-broadcast' has been used in the general principles and standing determinations to include broadcasts of Question Time of the House not broadcast live on a particular day, this is not technically a re-broadcast within the meaning of the Act and is more appropriately called a delayed broadcast of proceedings recorded earlier.⁷⁰

BROADCASTING OF EXCERPTS

The descriptions of radio broadcasting arrangements given above apply to the official ABC radio broadcast. Since November 1988 all radio stations or networks have also been

⁶⁹ Principles adopted in August 1994, VP 1993–95/1272–3.

⁷⁰ See advice of Attorney-General's Department, dated 5 June 1950.

permitted to broadcast excerpts from proceedings. After some development,⁷¹ the following conditions were established:

1. Excerpts may be taken from proceedings of each House (whether or not the proceedings are being continuously broadcast) commencing at the time fixed for the meeting of the House until the adjournment of that House until the next sitting.
2. Excerpts shall be recorded from the audio signal of proceedings transmitted by the House monitoring system throughout Parliament House, Canberra.
3. Excerpts are not to be used for the purposes of satire or ridicule.
4. Excerpts shall not be used for the purposes of political party advertising or in election campaigns.
5. Fairness and accuracy and a general overall balance should be observed.
- 5A. Excerpts of proceedings which are subsequently withdrawn shall be available for re-broadcast provided the withdrawal is also reported.
6. Excerpts must be placed in context. Commentators should identify Senators and Members at least by name.
7. Events in the galleries are not part of the proceedings and excerpts in relation to such events, as far as is practicable, should not be used.
8. Qualified privilege only shall apply to broadcasters in the use of excerpts.
9. The instructions of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate or their delegated representatives on the use of recorded excerpts, shall be observed at all times.
10. Where the excerpts are used on commercial networks, the station should try to ensure that advertising before and after excerpts is of an appropriate nature.
11. Where the audio excerpts of proceedings are used on television, their use may be that of audio over still frames, or overlay material.
12. Access to proceedings for the purpose of recording excerpts shall be on the basis of an undertaking to observe these guidelines.

Legal aspects

Members are covered by absolute privilege in respect of statements made in the House when the House is being broadcast. Absolute privilege also attaches to those persons authorised to broadcast or re-broadcast the proceedings. The Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act provides that:

No action or proceeding, civil or criminal, shall lie against any person for broadcasting or re-broadcasting any portion of the proceedings of either House of the Parliament or of a joint sitting.

Only qualified privilege may be held to attach to the broadcast of excerpts of proceedings, and it may be considered that this situation is appropriate given the fact that those involved in the broadcasting of excerpts act essentially on their own initiative, whereas those involved in the official radio broadcast and re-broadcast of proceedings have no discretion in the matter, being required to perform these functions by the law.

Historic records

The Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act requires the ABC to record, when so directed, notable occurrences in the proceedings of Parliament. Having regard to timing difficulties, the ABC has been given the initiative of choosing which parliamentary occasions to record, although it makes an appropriate recording when directed to do so. The directions in this regard and the oversight of the procedure involved are the responsibility of the Broadcasting Committee, which also decides the items to be put into safekeeping and makes the appropriate safekeeping arrangements.

⁷¹ H.R. Deb. (20.8.85) 11; H.R. Deb. (18.3.86) 1462–3, 1518, 1536–7; H.R. Deb. (19.3.86) 1557; H.R. Deb. (4.6.86) 4552.

A recording of a typical day's proceedings in both the House of Representatives and the Senate has been lodged with the British Institute of Recorded Sound and various archival authorities in Australia.

Photographs and films of proceedings

In 1992, following the decision by the House to authorise the live televising of its proceedings, the Speaker approved access to certain proceedings for still photography. Access is limited to photographers who are members of the Press Gallery or AUSPIC (the Government Photographic Service). A limited number of photographers representing major newspapers have been permitted to attend during Question Time, provided they have registered their wish to attend beforehand. Photographers' activities are subject to guidelines intended, where possible, to put them on the same footing as the television camera operators. No other photographing or filming of any part of the proceedings is permitted without the prior approval of the Speaker.⁷² With the establishment of the Main Committee, similar access has been given to its proceedings.

The provisions of the Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act must be complied with and no sound recording of the proceedings of the Senate or the House of Representatives or of any joint sitting may be made for use with any photograph or film prepared, unless approved by the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings.

A breach of the guidelines governing still photography of proceedings may lead to the imposition of penalties, including the withdrawal of permission to photograph in the Chamber. In 2000 some photographers were banned for two sittings when they photographed events in the public gallery in defiance of express instructions to the contrary. In 2004 photographers from seven newspapers were suspended from the galleries for seven sitting days for a similar breach.⁷³ Both cases involved photographs of disturbances, which the guidelines expressly prohibit.

Televising, recording and photographs of committee proceedings

Generally speaking, committee proceedings may be recorded for broadcasting or televising, and filmed or photographed, with the permission of the committee concerned. This topic is covered in more detail in the Chapter on 'Parliamentary committees'.

Public hearings in Parliament House are regularly televised on the House monitoring system, and webcast on the Parliament's internet site. The signal is available to the networks for re-broadcast and is transmitted by Sky News and TransACT.

Photography, filming, etc inside Parliament House

Approval for the taking of photographs or filming in Parliament House rests finally with either or both Presiding Officers. Earlier restrictions on the taking of photographs and filming have to some extent been relaxed by the Presiding Officers, the view having been taken that the general viewing, screening, publication and distribution of photographs and films of the Parliament, properly administered and supervised, may lead to a better public understanding of its activities and functioning. The taking of photographs and video footage

⁷² For example, the Speaker has approved requests to photograph Members making their first speeches.

⁷³ H.R. Deb. (16.2.2004) 24758, VP 2002–04/1432.

for private purposes is permitted in the areas of the building open to the public, except in the Chamber galleries when the House is sitting and in committee rooms.

Presiding Officers have always sought to ensure that Members and Senators are not harassed by visitors and media representatives seeking to take their photographs and that they are not photographed without their knowledge or at times when they would not wish to be photographed. Members may be photographed or filmed at any time in their own rooms in Parliament House provided it is done with their prior approval. On occasions either or both Presiding Officers have sought the views of party leaders before making a decision on a request, as it is considered that no photograph or film should be made to the disadvantage of any political party or Member. Requests to photograph or film Members in their party rooms are considered by the whip, or other Members, of the party concerned.

While press gallery photographers and television camera crews may take photographs or film on invitation in private rooms in Parliament House, the taking of photographs or film by media personnel elsewhere in the building is prohibited except with the specific permission of the Presiding Officers. The Presiding Officers do not normally grant permission for television interviews or other filming in the corridors and the non-public areas of Parliament House. However, in considering such requests, the Presiding Officers have regard to whether the filming is planned to occur on a sitting day, the purpose of the filming and the likelihood of disturbance to Members, Senators and other building occupants. Requests to film in public areas are usually approved, provided it is considered building occupants and visitors will not be disturbed or inconvenienced. Radio journalists may similarly make tapes on invitation in private rooms but taping elsewhere in the building is prohibited except with the specific permission of the Presiding Officers. Consequently, many television and radio interviews of Members occur outside the entrances to Parliament House or in the garden courtyards within the building.

Any breach of these rules may result in the withdrawal of press gallery accreditation by the Presiding Officers. In 1976 the accreditation of a press gallery photographer was withdrawn for two weeks because he photographed the Leader of the Opposition in his office after the Leader had given instructions that no photographs were to be taken.⁷⁴

Approval may be granted by the Speaker for official photographs of the Chamber, or other areas of the building under the Speaker's control, to be used in a publication provided that the source of the photograph is acknowledged. Under no circumstances may photographs or films taken in the Chamber or elsewhere in the building be sold or used to promote any commercial product through newspaper, television or other advertising media without approval; permission is not normally given.⁷⁵

There is no objection to the taking of photographs in committee rooms or private dining rooms, provided that no Members or other persons are included in the photographs unless their prior approval has been obtained.

Relations with the media

Important and useful though they may be, broadcasts and Hansard reports of parliamentary proceedings reach a relatively small proportion of the population. Undoubtedly most people rely on media reports for information about proceedings in the

⁷⁴ VP 1976-77/77-8; H.R. Deb. (18.3.76) 781-2; J 1976-77/74-5.

⁷⁵ See also Committee of Privileges, *Advertisement in the Canberra Times and other Australian newspapers on 18th August, 1965*, PP 210 (1964-66).

Parliament, and about the actions and policies of the Government. The effectiveness of parliamentary democracy is therefore in large part dependent on fair and accurate reporting.

Since its establishment the Commonwealth Parliament has acknowledged the importance of the media. This recognition is exemplified in the setting aside of galleries from which members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery may view parliamentary proceedings and the provision of office space and access to other facilities in Parliament House. Because, with some exceptions, newspaper and television organisations do not maintain offices in Canberra other than those provided in Parliament House, their staff operate from Parliament House on a full-time basis for the reporting of Canberra and district news, parliamentary or otherwise. Ministers as well as Members also work principally from their Parliament House offices when in Canberra. The result is a degree of formal and informal interaction. The ability to use excerpts from proceedings in television and radio programs has added to the ability of the electronic media to report on parliamentary proceedings.

Promoting community awareness

In recent years there has been an increasing interest by Members in better informing the public about the operations of the House, and a call for greater community involvement in the work of the House and its committees.⁷⁶ Action taken by the Department of the House of Representatives to promote public awareness and understanding of the role of the House has included:

- development and expansion of the House of Representatives internet site;
- a seminar program on the work of the House;
- a community guide to sources of information about the House;⁷⁷
- additional publications about the House, including a series of Infosheets,⁷⁸ a guide to procedures⁷⁹ and a colour magazine giving information about current committee inquiries and articles on House activities;⁸⁰
- advertising initiatives to encourage public input to committee inquiries; and
- employment of a specialist media liaison officer.

Internet access to the House

Modern technology has given members of the public far easier access to the House and its proceedings than was possible in the past, when information about the House, although public, was not so readily available. The House internet site⁸¹ now provides instant access to the following information:

- information about Members;
- the details of bills before the House;

76 Standing Committee on Procedure, *It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, PP 363 (1999).

77 *Your key to the House: a guide to the House of Representatives*, Canberra, Department of the House of Representatives, 1999.

78 *House of Representatives Infosheets* (<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/infosheets/>).

79 *House of Representatives—Guide to procedures*, 2nd edn, Canberra, Department of the House of Representatives, 2005.

80 *About the House*, Canberra, Department of the House of Representatives. Issue 1, Nov./Dec. 1999 (published 5 times a year).

81 <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/>

- information about committee inquiries and reports;
- the program of business;
- the Hansard record of debates;
- the official documents of the House—Votes and Proceedings and Notice Paper;
- the full range of Department of the House of Representatives publications, such as those noted above, and procedural texts including *House of Representatives Practice* and the Standing Orders;
- the live video broadcast of House and Main Committee proceedings, and selected public committee hearings.

Parliamentary Education Office

The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) was established in 1988 with the objective of increasing the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the significance, functions and procedures of parliamentary government. The office is jointly funded by the Department of the House of Representatives and the Department of the Senate. Its functions include:

- the provision of an information service on Parliament for Senators and Members, teachers and students and members of the public;
- the provision of active learning programs for visiting school students;
- the writing of curriculum material;
- the conducting of professional development activities for teachers; and
- assistance to community organisations in organising programs for young people at Parliament House.

PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCTS AND THE EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY

The question of the extent of the precincts of the permanent Parliament House was resolved definitively in 1988 with the passage of the *Parliamentary Precincts Act 1988*⁸² which provides as follows:

- The boundary of the parliamentary precincts is the approximately circular line comprising the arcs formed by the outer edge of the top of the retaining wall near the inner kerb of Capital Circle, and in places where there is no retaining wall, arcs completing the circle. [Where there is no retaining wall, the circle is indicated by markers—*see* map at Schedule 1 of the Act.]
- The parliamentary precincts consist of the land on the inner side of the boundary, and all buildings, structures and works, and parts of buildings, structures and works, on, above or under that land.
- If the Presiding Officers certify in writing that specified property is required for purposes of the Parliament, regulations may declare that the property shall be treated as part of the parliamentary precincts for the purposes of the Act.

⁸² Act No. 9 of 1988. The main provisions commenced, by proclamation, on 1 August 1988.

- The precincts are under the control and management of the Presiding Officers who may, subject to any order of either House, take any action they consider necessary for the control and management of the precincts.
- In respect of the ministerial wing in Parliament House, the powers and functions given to the Presiding Officers are subject to any limitations and conditions agreed between the Presiding Officers and the responsible Minister.

A parliamentary zone was declared by the Parliament when it passed the *Parliament Act 1974*, which not only determined Capital Hill as the site for the permanent Parliament House but also defined the parliamentary zone within which no building or other work could be erected without the approval of both Houses of Parliament.⁸³ After the Act came into effect it became the practice that all such proposals were referred to the Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House for consideration and report and more recently, the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories. The zone comprises the area bounded by State Circle, Commonwealth and Kings Avenues and the southern edge of Lake Burley Griffin. Parliament House also falls within a designated area for which land use planning, development and construction proposals must be referred to the National Capital Authority for comment.⁸⁴

In the United Kingdom both Houses, at the commencement of each session, order that during the session of Parliament the commissioner for police of the metropolis shall keep the streets leading to Parliament House free and open and ensure that no obstruction is permitted to hinder Lords or Members in approaching the House.⁸⁵ This order does not claim authority over the streets surrounding Parliament House, but facilitates the right of Members to have free access to attend the Parliament without molestation.⁸⁶

The Australian Parliament similarly does not claim authority over the streets surrounding the parliamentary precincts although it does claim the right of access for its Members to attend the Parliament. In 1975 a judgment in the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory on an appeal against a conviction for a parking offence held that:

Parliament enjoys certain privileges designed to ensure that it can effectively perform its function and there are some aspects of conduct concerning the operation of Parliament into which the courts will not inquire. Certain courtesies are customarily observed. Parliament, through the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the officers of the Parliament, controls the use of the buildings which it has for its purposes. Doubtless, it can also control the use of the immediate precincts of those buildings, but arrangements about such matters are made in a sensible and practical way, bearing in mind the reasonable requirements of Parliament. The fact is that there is no general abrogation of the ordinary law. It is not necessary for the effective performance by Parliament of its functions that there be any such abrogation. On the contrary, it must be very much in the interests of members, in their corporate and individual capacities, that the ordinary law should operate.

. . . The fact is that the law respecting the privileges of Parliament is itself part of the ordinary law. Part of that law is found in the Bill of Rights 1688. In a well-known passage, Stephen J. said (in *Bradlaugh v. Gossett* (1884) 12 QBD271 at 283): “I know of no authority for the proposition that an ordinary crime committed in the House of Commons would be withdrawn from the ordinary course of criminal justice”.⁸⁷

83 *Parliament Act 1974*, s. 5. E.g. VP 2002–04/420.

84 Pursuant to interim arrangements under the *ACT (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988*.

85 *May*, 23rd edn, pp. 208–9.

86 *May*, 23rd edn, pp. 143–4. See also Ch. on ‘Parliamentary privilege’.

87 See *Rees v. McCay* [1975] 7 ACT R7.

Within the building, the Presiding Officers determine matters in relation to the overall allocation and use of space.⁸⁸ The Speaker alone has the authority to determine such matters as the allocation of seats in the Chamber and office suites to Members and the order of priority for the acceptance of bookings for House of Representatives committee rooms.

The security of the parliamentary precincts

Responsibility for security in the parliamentary precincts is vested by the Parliamentary Precincts Act in the Presiding Officers. Before the passage of the Act this jurisdiction was based on custom and practice and the inherent powers of the Presiding Officers to maintain proper arrangements for the functioning of Parliament.

Security brings into conflict two principles basic to Parliament's traditions and usage. On the one hand, there is the undeniable right of people in a parliamentary democracy to observe their Parliament at work and to have reasonable access to their representatives. On the other hand, Members and Senators must be provided with conditions which will enable them to perform their duties in safety and without interference. This is basic to the operation of Parliament and a balance must be struck between these two important principles.

In 1978 some Members and Senators expressed concern that the security arrangements might become excessively elaborate and that the rights of Members, Senators and the public to gain access to, and to move freely within, Parliament House might be unnecessarily restricted. In a report later that year the Senate Committee of Privileges emphasised the view that an effective protection system was necessary for Parliament House and its occupants. It stressed that security measures implemented earlier in 1978 provided the basis for an effective system and were not, in the committee's opinion, in any way inconsistent with the privileges of Members of the Senate.⁸⁹

The safety of people who work in Parliament House, or who visit it on legitimate business or simply to see it in operation, is an important consideration. Some Members and Senators are prepared to accept that public office brings with it increased personal risk and perhaps are not easily convinced of the need for special arrangements for their own security. However, the need to ensure the safety of others in the parliamentary precincts is recognised.

A Security Management Board is the high level advisory and oversight body responsible for the security of the precincts. The Serjeant-at-Arms is a member of the board. Day to day security is maintained by the Assistant Secretary (Security and Facilities) in the Department of Parliamentary Services (who has a central coordinating role). The Usher of the Black Rod and the Serjeant-at-Arms are involved in operational matters if they impact on the Senate wing and Senators or the House wing and Members respectively. Parliamentary security staff and Australian Protective Service staff perform operational security duties under the control of the Assistant Secretary (Security and Facilities).

The parliamentary security staff are primarily responsible for internal security, that is, the operation of electronic security screening devices, the physical checking of people entering the building and general corridor surveillance. The Australian Protective Service,

⁸⁸ H.R. Deb. (28.8.52) 692; *see also* Ch. on 'The Speaker, Deputy Speakers and officers'.

⁸⁹ PP 22 (1978).

on the other hand, is responsible for the physical security of the external precincts and the ministerial wing. The Parliamentary Precincts Act provides that the functions of protective service officers in relation to the precincts shall be performed in accordance with general arrangements agreed between the Presiding Officers and the Minister administering the *Australian Protective Service Act 1987*. The Australian Federal Police provides a policing response to demonstrations and major incidents.

A pass system controls entry into the non-public areas of Parliament House. Members and Senators are not required to wear a pass. Other persons are not permitted to enter the non-public areas without a pass. People permanently employed in the building and others who need to enter Parliament House regularly are issued with photographic identity passes. Visitors granted entry to the non-public areas are issued with day passes, or passes covering specified periods, as the need arises. Passes must be worn by the pass holders. At times the main doors, or parts of the building that are normally open to the public, may be closed for security reasons. When demonstrations occur a restricted number of demonstrators, by way of a delegation, may be allowed inside the building by appointment.

Goods, mail and baggage brought into the building are checked by electronic means. On entering Parliament House all persons, including Members and Senators, must pass through electronic detection equipment similar to that used at airports and further screening is carried out of people seeking to enter the public galleries of the two chambers. It is a condition of entry to the building and the public galleries that any person desiring to enter shall submit to a search of his or her person or effects if so required.

Disorder and disturbances

To perform its functions the House must be protected from physical disruption, disturbance and obstruction and there is no doubt that the House has the power to protect itself from such actions. However, such actions, although they may technically constitute contempt, are in practice usually dealt with either through administrative action under the authority of the Presiding Officers or by remitting the matter to the authorities for criminal proceedings.

Visitors who misconduct themselves in that part of Parliament House controlled by the Speaker may be taken into custody by the Serjeant-at-Arms.⁹⁰ In the Chamber visitors are under the control of the Serjeant-at-Arms.

If a visitor or person other than a Member disturbs the operation of the Chamber or the Main Committee, the Serjeant-at-Arms can remove the person or take the person into custody.⁹¹ Such disturbances have included persons standing up, interjecting, applauding, holding up signs or placards, dropping or throwing objects into the Chamber, chaining themselves to railings and jumping onto the floor of the Chamber.⁹²

On the authority of the Serjeant-at-Arms, Usher of the Black Rod or authorised persons, persons creating a disturbance may be detained and interviewed, or ejected from Parliament House. Persons considered to pose a threat to the Parliament, for example, because of a history of attempts to disrupt proceedings, have been barred from entry to the Chamber or the building for a period of time by order of the Presiding Officers.

⁹⁰ S.O. 96.

⁹¹ S.O. 96(a). In practice parliamentary security staff perform this function under the overall direction of the Serjeant-at-Arms.

⁹² Significant or unusual recorded incidents when the House has been disturbed, and the action taken by the Chair, are summarised at page 128 of the 4th edition.

Application of the law in Parliament House

Although the ordinary criminal law applies within Parliament House, the actual charging of people creating a disturbance inside the building has in the past been difficult. For example, doubt had existed as to whether the Chambers were Commonwealth premises for the purposes of the *Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act 1971* and therefore protected against disturbances that caused no damage or injury. In 1965 a police constable arrested a person in King's Hall (of the provisional Parliament House) and a conviction was recorded against the person for using insulting words in a public place. Although it seemed doubtful that King's Hall was in fact a public place for the purposes of the Police Offences Ordinance, the Speaker stated that 'the constable acted properly, and with authority, in protection of the Parliament and its members'.⁹³ A person who jumped from the main public gallery onto the floor of the Chamber in September 1987 was not charged. In 2004 a person who jumped from the first floor northern gallery onto the floor of the Chamber was subsequently charged and convicted of related offences.

The *Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987* made the legal position clearer by declaring 'for the avoidance of doubt' that a law in force in the Australian Capital Territory applies, subject to section 49 of the Constitution, 'according to its tenor in and in relation to any building in the Territory in which a House meets, except as otherwise provided by that law or by any other law'.

The *Parliamentary Precincts Act 1988* further clarified the situation by providing that the Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act applies to the precincts as if they were Commonwealth premises within the meaning of that Act. The Parliamentary Precincts Act also provides that the functions of the Director of Public Prosecutions in respect of offences committed in the precincts shall be performed in accordance with general arrangements agreed between the Presiding Officers and the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The *Australian Capital Territory (Self Government) Act 1988* provides that either House may declare by resolution that an A.C.T. law enacted following self government does not apply to that House or its members, or in the parliamentary precincts.

Powers of police in Parliament

For most practical purposes, Parliament House is regarded as the only place of its kind and one in which the two Houses through their Presiding Officers have exclusive jurisdiction. Thus in Parliament House the police are subject to the authority of the Speaker and President and their powers are limited by the powers and privileges of the respective Houses.⁹⁴ Such limitations are not based on any presumed sanctity attached to the building as such, but on the principle that the Parliament should be able to conduct its business without interference or pressure from any outside source.⁹⁵

Police officers wishing to enter Parliament House in the ordinary course of their duties seek the consent of at least one of the Presiding Officers, which is in practice conveyed through the Serjeant-at-Arms, the Usher of the Black Rod or the Assistant Secretary (Security and Facilities). The police have no routine security role within the building or

93 H.R. Deb. (19.11.65) 2989.

94 Advice of Attorney-General's Department, concerning powers of police within the precincts of Parliament House, 1967; and opinion of Solicitor-General, dated 30 September 1926.

95 Advice of Attorney-General's Department, concerning powers of police within the precincts of Parliament House, 1967.

precincts but may be requested to provide a policing response to demonstrations or major incidents.

Police may not enter Parliament House for the purpose of interrogating anyone or executing a warrant without the express consent of the Speaker or President. There are a number of precedents of such consent being granted in the case of police wishing to interview Members. In commenting on one such incident the Speaker stated:

To avoid any misunderstanding as to the powers of the police in this building, I draw to the attention of the House that it is accepted as part of the Parliament's privileges and immunities that the police do not have a right to enter the Parliament building without the prior knowledge and consent of the President and/or the Speaker. The police officers who visited the honourable member yesterday sought my permission to do so before coming to the building. I gave that approval on two bases: First, yesterday was not a sitting day; and second, the honourable member . . . had indicated agreement to receiving the police officers.⁹⁶

The Parliament House offices of a Member and a Senator have been searched under the authority of a warrant.⁹⁷

The Parliamentary Precincts Act provides that where, under an order of either House relating to the powers, privileges and immunities of that House, a person is required to be arrested or held in custody, the person may be arrested or held by a member or special member of the Australian Federal Police in accordance with general arrangements agreed between the Presiding Officers and the Minister administering the *Australian Federal Police Act 1979*.

Demonstrations

In 1988 the Presiding Officers approved guidelines to be observed by the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Protective Service in managing demonstrations. The guidelines, incorporated in Hansard, include the provision that demonstrations by groups and persons shall not be permitted within the area of the parliamentary precincts bounded by and including Parliament Drive, provisions circumscribing the behaviour of demonstrators, the provision that any breach of the guidelines may be subject to police intervention and a map showing the 'authorised protest area'.⁹⁸ The guidelines have since been amended to cover the use of sound amplification by participants in any gathering within the precincts and to limit further the area where demonstrations may be held within the precincts to the area bounded by Parliament Drive and Federation Mall. The Parliament Act empowers the Australian Federal Police to remove structures erected by demonstrators without a permit in the parliamentary zone, including the area in front of Parliament House outside the precincts.

⁹⁶ VP 1978–80/1662; H.R. Deb. (16.9.80) 1293.

⁹⁷ *And see Crane v. Gething* (2000) FCA 4.

⁹⁸ H.R. Deb. (2.3.89) 328–9.