

5. HOUSE DOCUMENTS—AGENDA AND RECORD

Notice Paper

The Notice Paper is the House's agenda paper, listing all business before the House (S.O. 36). It is published before every sitting of the House but not on the first sitting of a new Parliament. It contains the following information:

Business section

The business section lists all items of business that are currently under consideration by the House. Items are grouped under the headings 'Government Business', 'Federation Chamber', 'Committee and Delegation Reports', and 'Private Members' Business'. The Notice Paper for Mondays also lists items of private Members' business chosen by the Selection Committee for discussion in the Chamber and Federation Chamber that day, together with an indication of agreed speaking times.

Items are listed as either 'Notices'—signifying that a Member or Minister has given notice of his or her intention to introduce a matter for consideration, or as 'Orders of the day'—signifying that the matter has already been introduced and the House has ordered it be considered, or further considered at a later sitting. Notice is not required for certain bills or proposals, for example appropriation or supply bills and bills or proposals dealing with taxation (S.O. 178).

Orders of the day are regarded as the property of the House and cannot be withdrawn or removed without the permission of the House (S.O. 117(b)). Before a notice is moved it may be withdrawn by the Member sponsoring it (S.O. 110(c)).

Items listed under private Members' business and committee and delegation reports are removed from the Notice Paper automatically if they have not been considered within eight sitting Mondays (S.O. 42). From time to time the House agrees to a motion to discharge from the Notice Paper government business items on which no further debate is sought.

At the end of a session (i.e. when the House is prorogued or dissolved) all business on the Notice Paper lapses and the next session starts with a clean sheet.

Order of business on Notice Paper

The House considers matters in the order they appear on the day's Notice Paper (S.O.s 112, 37(a)).

As a general rule, notices are first entered on the Notice Paper in the order they are received by the Clerk, with the provisos that notices from one Member are not placed consecutively in priority of a notice received from another Member during the same sitting, and private Members' notices given by government and non-government Members are placed alternately (S.O. 108).

However, the Leader of the House may change the order of government business before each issue of the Notice Paper is published (S.O. 45) and the Selection Committee similarly determines the order of committee and delegation business and private Members' business to be considered on Mondays (S.O.s 41, 222).

Notices given for a specified day take priority when that day is reached unless other business takes priority, e.g. as determined by the Selection Committee. If, at the adjournment of the House, any notices have not been called on, they are placed on the Notice Paper for the next sitting after the notices given for that day (S.O. 115).

Questions in writing section

Questions in writing are listed on the Notice Paper in the order in which they are received by the Clerk and remain there, unless withdrawn by the Member asking them, until written replies are received by the Clerk.

The first Notice Paper to be published for each sitting fortnight includes all unanswered questions. Notice Papers for subsequent sittings in the fortnight only include questions which appear for the first time that day. The latest list and text of all unanswered questions is available on the Notice Paper page of the House website at www.aph.gov.au/house/NP.

Information section

The final section of the Notice Paper contains general information. It lists occupants of the Chair; House and joint committees, their membership and current inquiries; and the appointment of Members to statutory bodies by the House.

Daily Program

The Daily Program, or ‘Blue Program’ or ‘Blue’, as it is also called (after the colour of the paper it is printed on), provides a guide to each day’s expected proceedings. Unlike the Notice Paper, the Daily Program is not a formal document and does not fix the order of business or limit its scope. If circumstances require a supplementary program may be published.

Some matters appear on the Daily Program which do not appear on the day’s Notice Paper—for example: acknowledgement of country and prayers; ministerial statements; the timing for discussion of a matter of public importance; the presentation of a major government document or a committee report; and business which may be introduced without notice, such as taxation measures (S.O. 178).

If the Federation Chamber is meeting, an attachment to the Daily Program lists the proposed Federation Chamber order of business. If any public hearings of House or joint committees are being held, another attachment gives details of these.

Votes and Proceedings

The Clerk is required to record all proceedings of the House in the Votes and Proceedings (S.O. 27). The Votes and Proceedings is the official record of the proceedings of the House of Representatives, in effect the minutes of its meetings. An issue of the Votes and Proceedings is published for each sitting and is available online in draft form the next business day after a sitting.

The Votes and Proceedings records what is done (or deemed to be done) by the House as a collective body, and not the words of individual Members.

For each item of business the Votes and Proceedings records all action taken by the House—for example, motions and amendments moved and the names of Members who moved them; whether debate occurred (or was adjourned to a future day or resumed from an earlier occasion); the questions put from the Chair and the decision taken by the House on each question. If a formal vote (division) has taken place the record lists the Members who voted for and against the question.

A typical day’s Votes and Proceedings records:

- that the House met at a certain time and the Speaker took the Chair, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers;
- that questions without notice were asked;

- the documents presented;
- motions moved in connection with any of the documents presented;
- any matter of public importance proposed for discussion and the fact that discussion took place;
- each motion and bill considered by the House;
- announcements of various kinds that have been made relating to the operation of the House—for example, details of ministerial arrangements or committee membership;
- messages received from the Senate or the Governor-General;
- the question for the adjournment of the House, the fact that debate took place (the adjournment debate), the time the House adjourned and the date and time of its next meeting;
- a list of documents deemed to have been presented;
- a record of Members' attendance; and
- the minutes of proceedings of the Federation Chamber (if it met that day).

Live Minutes

A current, informal record of proceedings underway is available online in draft form almost simultaneously: the Live Minutes for the Chamber and Live Minutes for the Federation Chamber. Neither has the formal status of the Votes and Proceedings, but they are updated at least every five minutes and include details such as the time of events and names and times for Members who have spoken. They offer a quick and practical way to track progress of business on the Daily Program and decisions made by the House and Federation Chamber.

Hansard

Hansard (official title 'Parliamentary Debates') contains the full report of the debates in the House and the Federation Chamber—that is, the transcript of Members' speeches. Hansard is not the official record of the proceedings of the House; that is the purpose of the Votes and Proceedings (S.O. 27).

Although Hansard is essentially a record of the spoken word, it contains other information relating to the proceedings, including the text of petitions presented and motions and amendments moved (even when not read out), the titles of documents tabled, and notices given by Members. It also contains Ministers' answers to questions in writing.

Hansard is issued in two editions. There is a proof issue available the day after the proceedings to which it refers, and a final issue from which the bound volumes are compiled. The Department of Parliamentary Services, which is responsible for the production of Hansard, recently commenced part-publishing proceedings periodically during a sitting day.

Incorporation of unspoken matter

By leave of the House and the approval of the Chair, material of various kinds may be incorporated into the text. The practice of the House restricts incorporation to documents that cannot easily be read into the record and which need to be seen for comprehension, such as maps and statistical tables or graphs. Members are not permitted to incorporate the text of speeches they have not delivered in the House.

A Member seeking leave to incorporate material is advised to first show the material to the Minister at the Table or to the Member leading for the Opposition, as the case may be. Leave may be refused if this courtesy is not observed. Even if the House authorises the incorporation of unread matter, the final decision rests with the Speaker.

Editing and corrections

While the Hansard text is edited to some extent—for example, to remove repetition and to correct grammatical mistakes—the editing is not permitted to affect the meaning of what is said.

Before the edited transcript is printed, each Member is given an opportunity to read what he or she has said and, if necessary, to make minor corrections. Although Members have this right to make corrections to their remarks, changes which alter the sense of words used in debate or introduce new matter are not permitted. In some instances of error or inaccuracy in the Hansard reports, the position is better clarified by a personal explanation.

Internet access to House documents

The documents described in this chapter are all publicly available via the House of Representatives website at www.aph.gov.au/house.