

HOUSE REVIEW



Selected features of House of Representatives business

Sitting period 6 – 15 February 2024 (no. 66)

The first sitting fortnight for the year featured an address by the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea and a number of late sittings.

Address by Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea

On 7 February the House resolved to invite Hon James Marape, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, to address the House the next day and agreed to arrangements for proceedings. The following day, the House met at 9.45 am. Following an acknowledgement of country and prayers, the Speaker welcomed Senators as guests and Prime Minister Marape was announced. The Speaker, Prime Minister Albanese and the Leader of the Opposition made welcoming remarks before Prime Minister Marape gave his address. The Speaker expressed thanks on behalf of the House before Prime Minister Marape was escorted from the House and the sitting was suspended.

By-election: Dunkley electorate

On 6 February, the Speaker informed the House that he had issued a writ for the election of a Member for the Division of Dunkley to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Ms Murphy. Polling day has been set for Saturday, 2 March 2024.

Presentation of Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce annual report

On Wednesday, 7 February, the Speaker presented the annual report of the Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce and made a statement acknowledging that an unacceptably high rate of people in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces had experienced bullying, sexual harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault while at work. It had been two years since the Presiding Officers had made the first statement on behalf of the parliamentary cross-party leadership task force as recommended by Commissioner Jenkins. The Speaker recommitted the Parliament to positive change and acknowledged progress to date. The Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Nationals, the Leader of the Australian Greens and the Member for Warringah each made a statement by indulgence on the same matter.

Marking the deaths of a former Member and a former Senator

On Tuesday, 6 February, the Speaker informed the House of the death on 19 December 2023 of Mr Barry Wakelin OAM, a Member for Grey from 1993 to 2003. On 8 February, the Speaker informed the House of the death on 11 January 2024 of Philip Ross Lightfoot, a Senator for Western Australia from 1997 to 2008. Following each announcement, all Members present rose in silence as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased.

Ministerial statement on anniversary of Apology to Stolen Generations

On 13 February, the Prime Minister made a statement, by leave, on the 16th anniversary of the national apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, and the Leader of the Opposition then addressed the House in reply. The Leader of the House moved a take note motion, which, after speeches by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, was referred to the Federation Chamber for further debate.

Condolence motion

Before Question Time on 6 February, the Prime Minister moved a motion of condolence for Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE. After the Leader of the Opposition seconded the motion and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs and the Leader of the Nationals had spoken, all Members present rose in silence. Debate was adjourned and the order of the day was referred to the Federation Chamber for further debate.

Legislation

Introductions

During the fortnight, 17 Government bills were presented.

Two private Members' bills were introduced. The first related to communications offences and voluntary assisted dying, and the second related to prohibitions on the purchase of residential property by foreign entities. On each occasion the mover shared their speaking time with the seconder. One private Senator's bill, relating to defence capability, was also received and read a first time, with the second reading made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Passing the House

On Tuesday, 6 February the Treasurer introduced the Treasury Laws Amendment (Cost of Living Tax Cuts) Bill 2024 and moved that the bill be read a second time. The second reading debate—a cognate debate which also covered an associated Medicare levy bill also introduced by the Treasurer—continued across a number of days. On 7 February and again on 12 February, the House resolved, on motion by the Leader of the House, to suspend standing orders to enable the second reading debate to continue until 10 pm that evening, following the usual adjournment debate from 7.30 pm to 8 pm. Debate continued until 10 pm on both days. During the debate, an Opposition Member (the Member for Hume) moved a second reading amendment, to which a crossbench Member (the Member for Brisbane) later moved a further amendment.

On 13 February, the Leader of the House, pursuant to notice, moved a debate management motion providing for the second reading debate to continue from 8 pm to 10 pm that evening and the following evening from 8 pm until no further Members rose to speak. The motion also provided that, when the bill was called on on Thursday, 15 February, questions on the amendments would be put immediately, a consideration in detail stage could be held if required and any remaining questions required to conclude consideration in detail would be put at no later than 1 pm, with the question on the third reading then being put immediately. Proceedings on the cognate bill would then be called on and questions on remaining stages put without amendment or debate.

The second reading debate continued across 13 February (with the House sitting until 10 pm) and 14 February, when the House adjourned at 8.14 pm, no further Members rising to speak. The following day, as provided for by the debate management motion, when the bill was called on shortly before 10 am, the question was put on the Member for Brisbane's amendment. After the amendment was defeated on division, the question was put on the Member for Hume's amendment, which was also defeated on division. The second reading was then agreed to on the voices.

During consideration in detail, three Opposition Members moved different amendments to the short title of the bill. On each occasion the amendment was defeated on division. The bill was then agreed to and the question on the third reading was carried on the voices.

The Treasury Laws Amendment (Cost of Living—Medicare Levy) Bill 2024 was called on and the questions on the second and third readings put and passed on the voices.

Sixteen other government bills passed the House during the fortnight.

Communication with the Senate

The Senate sat from 6 to 8 February, as its committees considered additional estimates in the second week of the fortnight.

Before it rose on 8 February, the Senate agreed to the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No. 2) Bill 2023. This bill resulted from the division of the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes) Bill in December last year, when the Senate and the House agreed to incorporate certain provisions of that bill into a separate bill. The Senate returned these provisions to the House in the form of a new bill, having inserted a title and enacting words and made further amendments.

When the Senate message was reported to the House on Monday, 12 February, the Leader of the House moved that the amendments be considered immediately. An amendment moved by the Manager of Opposition Business seeking to substitute 'at the next sitting' for 'immediately' was defeated on division. The original question was agreed to on division.

Standing order 158 provides for the House to make relevant amendments to any Senate amendments, while standing order 160 provides for the House to make further amendments to a House bill returned from the Senate if the further amendments are relevant to or consequent on Senate amendments (or requests for amendments). As with other amendments, leave is required to move more than one such amendment at a time.

While the House was considering the Senate amendments, the Manager of Opposition Business, by leave, moved four amendments to the Senate amendments together. These were defeated on division. The Leader of the House then moved closure of the question 'that the Senate amendments be agreed to'. After this was agreed to on division, the House divided on and agreed to the original question. The Manager of Opposition Business then rose to move further amendments in accordance with standing order 160. Leave was not granted to move these amendments together. A subsequent motion to suspend standing and sessional orders had not been seconded when proceedings were interrupted at 1.30 pm in accordance with standing order 43. A motion must be moved and seconded and the question stated before it is in the possession of the House; otherwise such a procedural motion lapses.

Later that afternoon, the Manager of Opposition Business moved to suspend standing and sessional orders to enable him to move further amendments relevant to or consequent on the Senate amendments to the bill. The motion was defeated on division.

The House is scheduled to meet next on 26 February.

Further information on the work of the House

[Bills and legislation](#)—access bills, explanatory memoranda, amendments, speeches, information about key stages of a bill's consideration, and a tracking option

[Live Minutes](#)—a real time summary of House decisions and proceedings. When used in conjunction with the [Daily Program](#), the Live Minutes are a simple way to track the House's work each day

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

[House of Representatives Standing and Sessional Orders](#), as at 2 August 2022—the House's rules of procedure

[Procedural Digest](#)—a record of selected procedural events in the House of Representatives Chamber and the Federation Chamber. It includes Speaker's rulings, precedents and unusual situations.