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Parliamentary sitting days and hours 2008

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Introduction

This background note provides figures for the sitting days (and, where available, sitting hours) for a range of national parliaments and for all Australian parliaments in the 2008 calendar year.

Sitting hours are for main parliamentary chambers and do not include meetings of chamber extensions (such as the Australian House of Representatives Main Committee) or separate parliamentary committees. The sessions of main parliamentary chambers are referred to by some parliaments as ‘plenary sessions’. Where the available data allows, breaks and suspensions of sittings have been excluded from the sitting hours figures. Sources for Tables 1 and 2 are listed in Appendix A.

Parliaments vary as to how they conduct their business, and not all parliaments will conduct the majority of their legislative business in their main chambers. The Japanese Parliament, for example, conducts the majority of its legislation debates in a range of committees rather than in its main chambers (the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors)—plenary sessions in the chambers are used mainly for voting. In 2008 only 10.5 per cent of sitting days for the House of Representatives took place in plenary sessions (60 sitting days out of a total of 571)—the other 89.5 per cent (511 sitting days) took place in the committees. Similarly, for the House of Councillors, only nine per cent of sitting days in 2008 took place in plenary sessions (45 sitting days out of a total of 501)—the other 91 per cent (456 sitting days) took place in the committees.¹

1. The 2008 plenary session sitting hours for the Houses were proportionally even lower. For the House of Representatives, four-and-a-half per cent of sitting hours took place in plenary sessions (51.6 sitting hours out of a total of 1153.4)—the other 95.5 per cent (1101.8 sitting hours) took place in the committees. For the House of Councillors just over four per cent of sitting hours took place in plenary sessions (40.12 sitting hours out of a total of 967.15)—95.85 per cent (927.03 sitting hours) took place in the committees. (Sitting days and hours figures courtesy of the Japanese Parliamentary Library).

National parliaments

Table 1. Sitting days and hours for selected national parliaments, 2008

Country	Chamber	Sitting days	Sitting hours:minutes
Australia	House of Representatives	69	638:30
	Senate	52	481:37
United Kingdom	House of Commons	149	1188:02
	House of Lords	148	1009:54
Canada	House of Commons	93	—
	Senate	56	160:00
New Zealand	House of Representatives	61	486:10
United States of America	House of Representatives	118	—
	Senate	184	988:31
Republic of Ireland	Dáil Éireann (House of Representatives)	96	794:58
	Seanad Éireann (Senate)	93	550:35
South Africa	National Assembly	58	141:20
	National Council of Provinces	43	91:12
Germany	Bundestag	100	—
	Bundesrat	13	—

Notes

United Kingdom

Figures for the House of Commons comprise 139 sitting days and 1106:36 sitting hours from the 2007–08 session and 10 days and 81:26 sitting hours from the 2008–09 session.²

Canada

A general election was held on 14 October 2008. Prior to the election the 39th Parliament was dissolved on 7 September 2008. The 40th Parliament was opened on 18 November 2008 and was adjourned on 4 December 2008.³

New Zealand (unicameral)

An election for the House of Representatives was held on 8 November 2008. Prior to the election the 48th Parliament was dissolved on 3 October 2008. The 49th Parliament was opened on 8 December 2008 and was adjourned on 18 December 2008.⁴

South Africa

Figures for both chambers include six days of joint sittings.

Germany

The Bundesrat, which consists of members appointed by the German states (Länder), usually holds one plenary session every three weeks (an average of 13 sitting days per year).⁵

2. Yearly sitting day figures for a number of Commonwealth parliaments (national and sub-national) are published annually in *The Table*, the journal of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table in Commonwealth Parliaments. Electronic versions of *The Table* from 2003 onwards are accessible at the Society website, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://www.societyofclerks.org>
3. Canada, Parliament, 'Key dates for each Parliament', 'Fortieth: Current Parliament', Parliament of Canada website, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/compilations/parliament/KeyDates.aspx?Language=E>, <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Files/Parliament.aspx?Item=8714654b-cdbf-48a2-b1ad-57a3c8ece839&Language=E>
4. New Zealand, Parliament, '48th Parliament has been dissolved', '49th Parliament opened today', Parliament of New Zealand website, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/Features/e/c/d/00NZPHomeNews061020081-48th-Parliament-has-been-dissolved.htm>, <http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/Features/c/4/e/00NZPHomeNews081220081-49th-Parliament-opened-today.htm>; New Zealand, House of Representatives, *Journals of the House for the week beginning Tuesday, 16 December 2008*, 18 December 2008, pp. 79, 81, viewed 18 November 2009, http://www.parliament.nz/NR/rdonlyres/8258FF98-3F32-4364-A249-AC506CD01E80/99842/2008_12_16_Weekly_1.pdf
5. Germany, Bundesrat, 'Preparing for the plenary', 'Bundesrat members', Bundesrat website, viewed 18 November 2009, http://www.bundesrat.de/nn_11590/EN/funktionen-en/arbeitweise-en/Vorbereitung-Plenum-en.html, http://www.bundesrat.de/nn_11006/EN/organisation-en/mitglieder-en/mitglieder-en-node.html?_nnn=true

Table 1 is represented graphically in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1. Sitting days for selected national parliaments, 2008

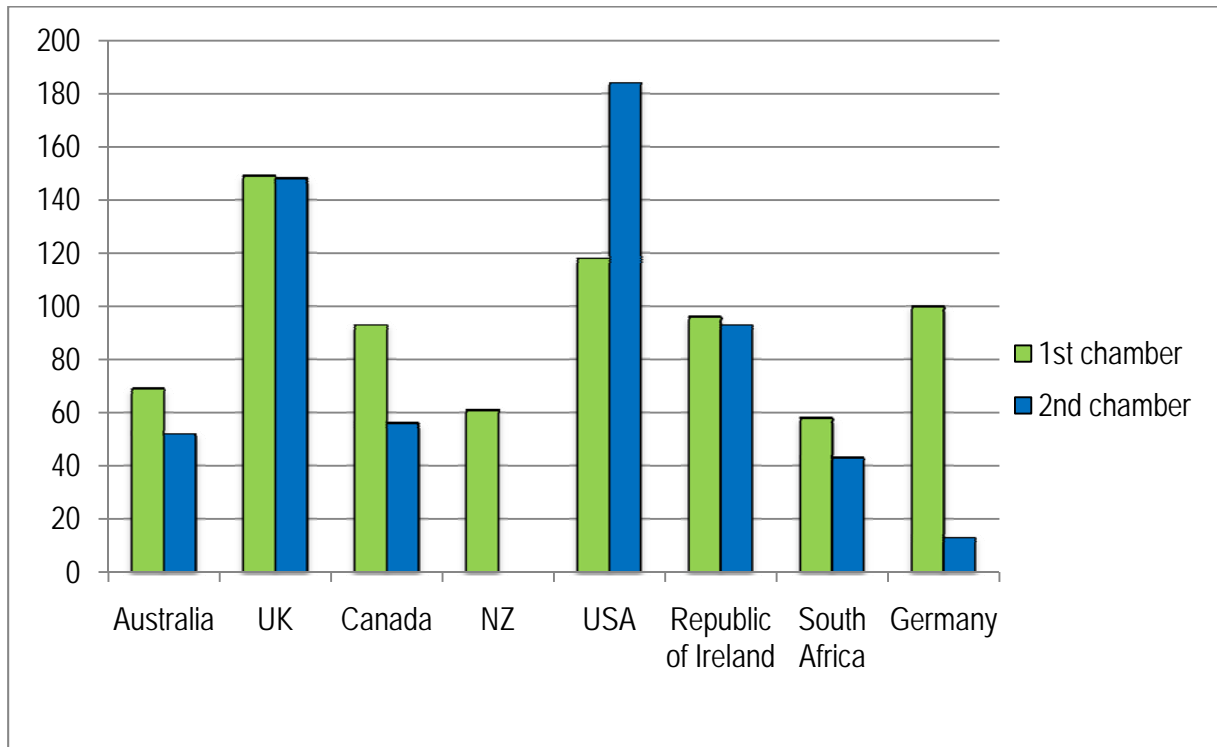
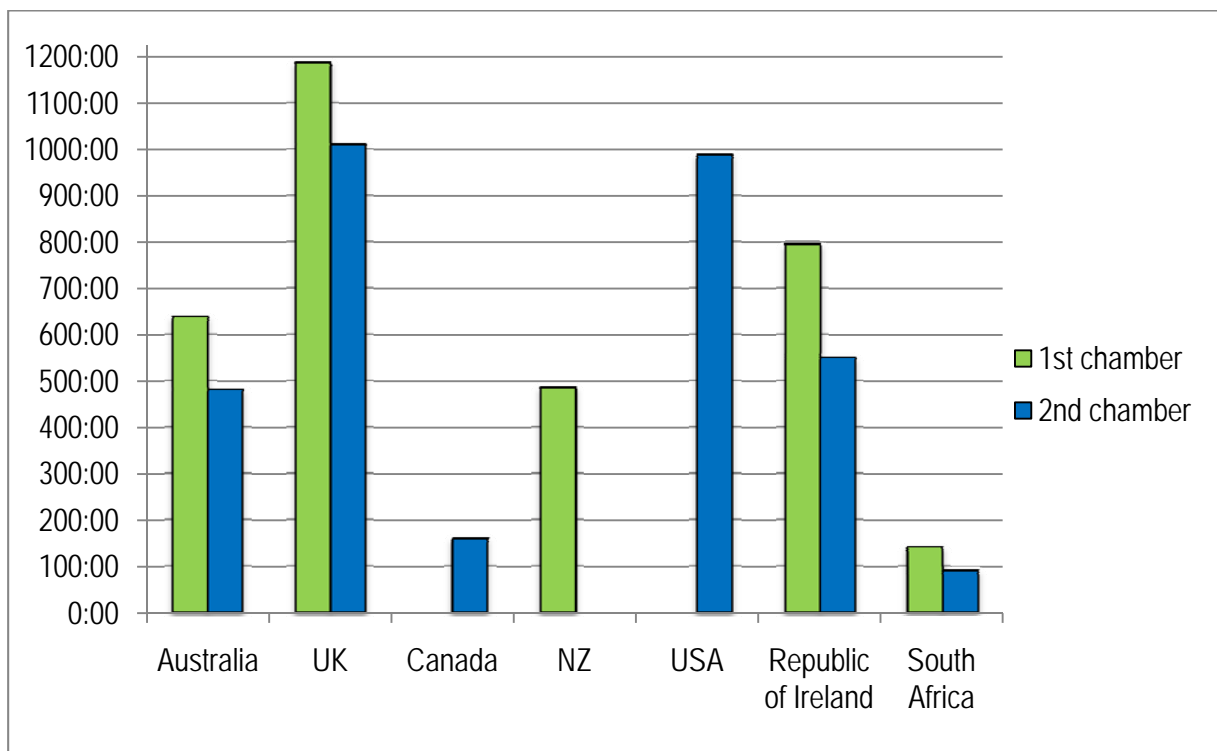


Figure 2. Sitting hours:minutes for selected national parliaments, 2008



Australian parliaments

Table 2. Sitting days and hours for Australian parliaments, 2008

Jurisdiction	Chamber	Sitting days	Sitting hours:minutes
Commonwealth	House of Representatives	69	638:30*
	Senate	52	481:37*
New South Wales	Legislative Assembly	59	442:23
	Legislative Council	49	343:30
Victoria	Legislative Assembly	49	508:55#
	Legislative Council	52	508:50
Queensland	Legislative Assembly	43	408:28*
South Australia	House of Assembly	48	282:47
	Legislative Council	50	352:24
Western Australia	Legislative Assembly	38	263:39
	Legislative Council	45	270:09
Tasmania	House of Assembly	47	371:51
	Legislative Council	45	279:50
Northern Territory	Legislative Assembly	35	309:29
Australian Capital Territory	Legislative Assembly	35	312:00#

Notes

* Excludes suspensions of sittings/meal breaks.

Includes suspensions of sittings/meal breaks.

The Queensland, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory parliaments are unicameral.

Western Australia

A general election was held on 6 September 2008.⁶ Prior to the election the Legislative Assembly of the 37th Parliament was prorogued and dissolved, and the Legislative Council was prorogued, on 7 August 2008.⁷ The 38th Parliament was opened on 6 November 2008 and the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly were adjourned on 9 and 11 December 2008 respectively.⁸

Northern Territory

An election for the Legislative Assembly was held on 9 August 2008.⁹ Prior to the election the 10th Assembly was prorogued on 22 July 2008.¹⁰ The 11th Assembly was opened on 9 September 2008 and was adjourned on 27 November 2008.¹¹

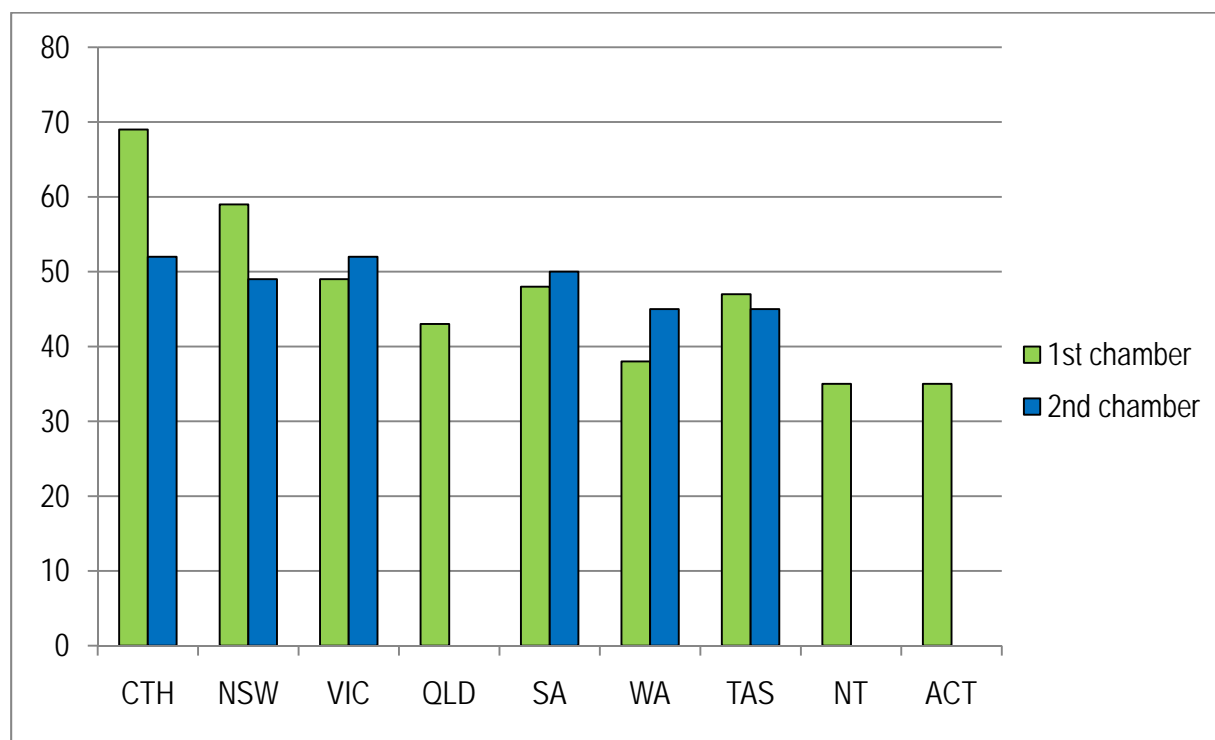
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6. Western Australian (WA) Electoral Commission, '2008 State General Election Details', WA Electoral Commission website, viewed 18 November 2009, http://www.waec.wa.gov.au/elections/state_elections/election_results/2008_State_General_Election/key_dates_and_deadlines.php
 7. WA Government, *Western Australian Government Gazette*, no. 135, WA Government Printer, Perth, 7 August 2008, viewed 18 November 2009, [http://www.slp.wa.gov.au/gazette/gazette.nsf/gazlist/7D0A7F8584D9837AC825749E002D31FE/\\$file/gg135.pdf](http://www.slp.wa.gov.au/gazette/gazette.nsf/gazlist/7D0A7F8584D9837AC825749E002D31FE/$file/gg135.pdf)
 8. WA, Legislative Assembly, *Votes and Proceedings*, no. 1, 6 November 2008, p. 1, *Votes and Proceedings*, no. 11, 11 December 2008, p. 107; WA, Legislative Council, *Minutes of Proceedings*, no. 1, 6 November 2008, p. 1, *Minutes of Proceedings*, no. 10, 9 December 2008, p. 91, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/web/newwebparl.nsf/iframewebpages/Parliamentary+Business+-+Chamber+Documents>
 9. Northern Territory (NT) Electoral Commission, 'Past Election/Referendum Results', NT Electoral Commission website, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://notes.nt.gov.au/nteo/Electorl.nsf?OpenDatabase>
 10. NT Government, *Government Gazette*, no. S37, Government Printer of the NT, Darwin, 23 July 2008, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://www.nt.gov.au/ntg/gazette/2008/s37.pdf>
 11. NT, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Record: Minutes of Proceedings*, no. 1, 9 September 2008, *Parliamentary Record: Minutes of Proceedings*, no. 3, 27 November 2008, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://notes.nt.gov.au/lant/hansard/hansard11.nsf/f1ed3b562e14751be9256bd70022cc94/a65720273781ca86692574e8001c5b20?OpenDocument>, <http://notes.nt.gov.au/lant/hansard/hansard11.nsf/f1ed3b562e14751be9256bd70022cc94/0a6354a4fa7c02006925752f007cf6ed?OpenDocument>

Australian Capital Territory

An election for the Legislative Assembly was held on 18 October 2008.¹² Prior to the election the 6th Assembly was adjourned on 28th August 2008.¹³ The 7th Assembly was opened on 5 November 2008 and was adjourned on 11 December 2008.¹⁴

Table 2 is represented graphically in Figures 3 and 4 below.

Figure 3. Sitting days for Australian parliaments, 2008

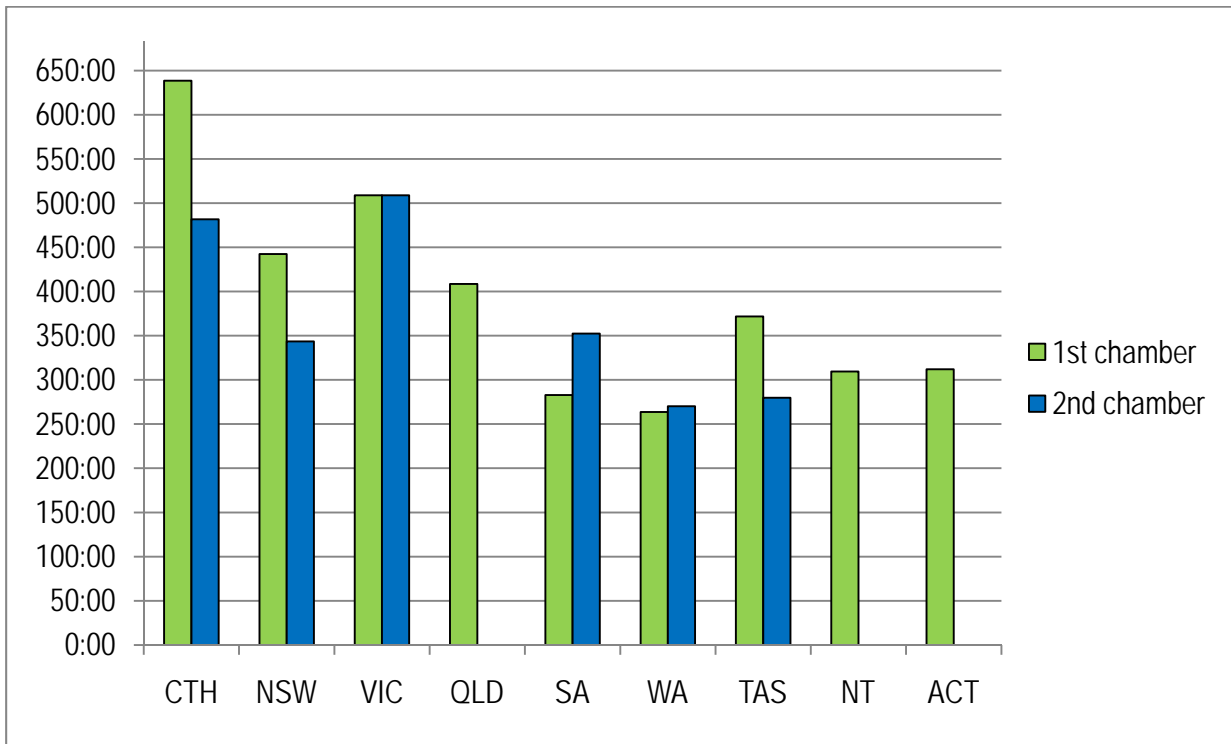


12. Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Electoral Commission, 'Election timetable—2008 Election', ACT Electoral Commission website, viewed 18 November 2009, http://www.elections.act.gov.au/elections/2008/timetable_08.html

13. ACT, Legislative Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, no. 157, 28 August 2008, p. 1788, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/minutes-of-proceedings/08MoP157.pdf>. The ACT Legislative Assembly has fixed terms under section 100 of the *Electoral Act 1992* (ACT).

14. ACT, Legislative Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, no. 1, 5 November 2008, p. 1, *Minutes of Proceedings*, no. 4, 11 December 2008, p. 59, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/minutes-of-proceedings/08MoP01.pdf>, <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/minutes-of-proceedings/08MoP04.pdf>

Figure 4. Sitting hours:minutes for Australian parliaments, 2008



Appendix A: Sources for Tables 1 and 2

National parliaments

Australia

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Department of the Senate, 'Days and Hours of Sitting 2001–2010 (to 29 October 2009)', Senate website, viewed 18 November 2009, http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/work/statistics/bus_senate/Consolidations/2001-2010/days_hours.html

United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Japan

Information courtesy of the UK House of Commons Information Office; the House of Lords Information Office; the Canadian House of Commons Table Research Branch; the New Zealand Parliamentary Library; the South African Parliamentary Library; and the Japanese Parliamentary Library.

United States of America

Library of Congress, 'Days in Session Calendars: 110th Congress 2nd Session', Library of Congress website, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/ds/h1102.html>

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Republic of Ireland

Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, *Annual Report 2008*, Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, Dublin, 2009, p. 23, viewed 18 November 2009, <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/commission/reports/2008.pdf>

Germany

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Bundesrat, *Fortschreibung der Statistik der beratenen Vorlagen*, Bundesrat, Berlin, 2009, p. 4, viewed 18 November 2009, http://www.bundesrat.de/cln_099/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/statistik/fortschreibung_templateId=raw,property=publicationFile.pdf/fortschreibung.pdf

Australian parliaments

Commonwealth

Sources as above.

New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory

Information courtesy of the New South Wales Parliamentary Library; the Parliament of South Australia; the Western Australian Parliamentary Library; the Tasmanian Parliamentary Library; and the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly.

Victoria

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Queensland

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Australian Capital Territory

M McRae, D Abbott and T Duncan, eds, *Companion to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory*, Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, Canberra, 2008, p. 368, viewed 18 November 2009,

<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/companion/companion.pdf>

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