

An annotated routine of business

MEETING

Acknowledgement of country and prayers

MONDAY
10 am

TUESDAY
midday

WEDNESDAY
9 am

THURSDAY
9 am

The bells ring for 5 minutes prior to the Senate meeting.

Senators stand as the President is announced by the Black Rod.

The President bows to each side of the chamber; senators return the bow.

The President makes an acknowledgement of country and reads a prayer: [standing order 50](#)

Documents presented

MONDAY
10 am

TUESDAY
midday

WEDNESDAY
9 am

A list of documents to be presented (or 'tabled') will be attached to the **Red**.

They include:

- Annual reports of departments and agencies
- Reports of the Auditor-General
- Responses to Senate resolutions.

30 minutes is set aside to debate the documents on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon.

Up to one hour is set aside on Thursday afternoons, after question time and motions to take note of answers, to debate documents tabled on previous days and kept on the *Notice Paper* (and other reports).

Guides to Senate procedure

[10. Tabling of documents](#)

[11. Opportunities for debating documents and reports](#)

Clerk's documents

MONDAY
10 am

TUESDAY
midday

WEDNESDAY
9 am

THURSDAY
9 am

Tabling of documents required to be presented by Acts of Parliament.

These include legislative instruments: eg regulations, determinations, rules, orders.

The Senate may 'disallow' many regulations and similar instruments so that they cease to have effect. That process operates according to a time frame that begins on the day the instrument is tabled.

Guides to Senate procedure

[10. Tabling of documents](#)

[19. Disallowance](#)

Committees—proposals to meet

MONDAY 10 am	TUESDAY midday	WEDNESDAY 9 am	THURSDAY 9 am
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Committees require leave of the Senate to hold public hearings and some private meetings when the Senate is sitting: [standing order 33](#). Committees can, through their chairs, lodge forms asking for authorisation to meet. In practice, these are lodged with the Table Office by committee secretaries.

Proposals to meet are listed on the **Red**. These are taken to be approved unless any senator requests that a proposal be put to a vote, in which case the President proposes the question ‘that the committee be authorised to meet’, which is determined by the Senate without amendment or debate.

Private senators’ bills

		WEDNESDAY after 9 am for 1 hr and 10 min	THURSDAY after 9 am for 1 hr and 10 min
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Most bills considered by the Senate are government bills, introduced by ministers. However, time is set aside on Wednesday and Thursday mornings to consider bills introduced by other senators (“private senators’ bills”). Private senators’ bills may also be considered on Thursday afternoon, at a time set aside for *General business*.

The bill or bills to be considered are set by motion, usually moved by the Manager of Government Business, either during a previous sitting day or at the start of this item of business.

The usual time limits for consideration of legislation apply, that is, up to 15 minutes per speaker on the second reading debate and 10 minute contributions during committee of the whole.

Senators often seek to have the question put on different stages of the bill [[standing order 199, closure of debate](#)], or to adjourn debate to bring on another bill [[standing order 201](#)]. These motions may be moved by a senator who has not spoken in the debate, or by a minister, and are determined by majority decision.

Guides to Senate procedure

[16. Consideration of legislation](#)

[2. Rules of debate](#)

[4. Categories of business](#)

Government business *only*

MONDAY after 10 am till 1.30 pm	TUESDAY after midday till 1.30 pm	WEDNESDAY after private senators' bills till 12.15 pm	THURSDAY after private senators' bills till 11.15 am
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Government business

MONDAY late afternoon and evening till 8 pm	TUESDAY late afternoon till 7.30 pm	WEDNESDAY late afternoon till 7.30 pm	THURSDAY before 12.15 pm and then till 1.30 pm
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Debate on motions moved by ministers. Most time is spent on consideration of government bills.

Speaking lists are generally prepared by the Government Whip's office.

Where the routine specifies government business "only", *Government business* takes precedence; in other cases the Senate may first have to deal with *Matters of privilege* and *Business of the Senate*.

Non-controversial government legislation is considered on Thursday from 12.15 pm.

Guides to Senate procedure

[16. Consideration of legislation](#)

[4. Categories of business](#)

Senators' statements

MONDAY 1.30 pm till 2 pm	TUESDAY 1.30 pm till 2 pm	WEDNESDAY 12.15 till 1.30 pm* 1.30 pm till 2 pm	THURSDAY 1.30 pm till 2 pm
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Senators may make statements on topics of their choosing. A speaking list is prepared by the Government Whip's office.

Time limits per speaker:

- Each day between 1.30 pm and 2 pm—2 minutes
 - * On Wednesday between 12.15 pm and 1.30 pm—10 minutes
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Question time and after

MONDAY 2 pm	TUESDAY 2 pm	WEDNESDAY 2 pm	THURSDAY 2 pm
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Questions

Senators may ask Ministers questions relating to their ministerial responsibilities. The rules for questions are in [standing order 73](#).

Questions are allocated to parties approximately in proportion to their numbers in the Senate, and the order of questions is determined by the President. Senators given the call may ask one question (1 minute, with a 2 minute answer) followed by two supplementary questions (30 secs each, with 1 minute answers).

Time limit: approximately an hour, ending when the Leader of the Government asks “That further questions be placed on notice.”

Motions to take note of answers

Debate on answers given at question time.

A motion is moved in the form “That the Senate take note of the answer(s) given by...to the question(s) asked by...”

Debate must be relevant to the motion moved.

By convention, an initial motion is moved by an opposition senator, with the call alternating between the opposition and government for the first 5 speakers. A cross-bench senator is then given the call to either contribute to the initial debate or move a motion to note a different answer.

Time limit: 30 mins; 5 min speeches

Guides to Senate procedure

[6. Questions](#)

Petitions, notices, placing of business and formal business (informally: Housekeeping)

MONDAY 3.30 pm	TUESDAY 3.30 pm	WEDNESDAY 3.30 pm	THURSDAY 11.15 am
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After Question time on Mondays to Wednesdays and after government business on Thursday morning, the Senate deals with a number of items mostly connected with placing and rearranging business on the Notice Paper, and using a fast-track process (“Formal business”) to vote on motions for which notice has previously been given. It is common for multiple divisions to be held during this time.

Petitions

The Clerk announces the presentation of petitions, which senators have lodged with the Senate Table Office.

There is no opportunity to debate petitions. Senators commonly speak about petitions during the adjournment debate or senators’ statements each day or during other relevant speaking opportunities.

Notices of motion given

Decisions of the Senate begin as motions moved by senators. The first step is usually for a senator to give notice of intention to move a motion on a subsequent day. Notices can be handed to the Clerk or lodged with the Table Office before the time for notices each day. Senators may also choose to read out their notices at the relevant time (an attendant will then deliver them to the Clerk).

Senators seeking to withdraw a notice of motion given on a previous day may do so at any time but ordinarily do so at this time.

Selection of Bills Committee report

After the time for notices on any day (but typically on Thursday) the Chair of the Selection of Bills Committee may table the committee’s report, recommending that bills be referred to legislation committees for inquiry and report. The Chair moves a motion to adopt the report, which may be debated for 30 minutes, with 5 minutes per speaker: [standing order 115\(6\)](#). Senators often move amendments to the adoption motion, proposing to vary the committee’s recommendations (eg, to add or remove bills or alter the reporting date).

Placing of business

This item deals mainly with the postponement or rearrangement of business, including extending the time for committees to report.

Postponements and extensions: Senators can lodge forms with the Table Office requesting that their notices be postponed to a future date. Similarly, committees can, through their chairs, lodge forms asking to extend their reporting dates. [In practice, these are lodged with the Table Office by committee secretariats.]

If there is no time to lodge the relevant form, these matters may be dealt with by leave (that is, where no senator present objects).

Proposals to postpone notices or extend reporting dates are listed on the **Red** and/or announced by the Clerk. These are taken to be approved unless any senator requests that a proposal be put to a vote, in which case the President proposes the question “that the item be postponed” or “the reporting date be extended”, which is determined by the Senate without amendment or debate.

Other matters that may be dealt with here include:

- senators (usually whips) moving that leave of absence be granted to senators
- ministers proposing particular items of business be dealt with during the time set aside for private senators’ bills (for Wednesday and Thursday morning), non-controversial government business (Thursday lunchtime) and general business (Thursday afternoon).

Formal business

This is a fast-track method for dealing with some types of motions allowing votes to be taken on motions listed on the Notice Paper, provided no senator objects to proceeding this way: [standing order 66](#).

Types of general business motions that may be dealt with as formal motions are restricted to:

- the consideration of legislation by the Senate (including the introduction of bills)
- the conduct of Senate business
- the conduct of Senate or joint committee business (including the appointment of a select committee)
- proposing an order for the production of documents (including proposing further action in relation to an order for the production of documents).

Motions that fall under other categories of business may also be taken as formal.

In theory, formal motions are voted on “without amendment or debate”, but in practice these can occur by leave (that is, where no senator present objects).

It is common for there to be divisions during this time.

Guides to Senate procedure

[4. Categories of business](#)

[7. Petitions](#)

[8. Notices of motion](#)

[13. Referring matters to committees](#)

MPI or urgency motion

MONDAY

after formal business

TUESDAY

after formal business

WEDNESDAY

after formal business

Discussion or debate on matters lodged by letter to the President of the Senate in accordance with [standing order 75](#). Up to two proposals may be considered each day, and must be submitted to the Sub-Table Office (SG.105) by 8.30 am. If more than two proposals are lodged, the matter is determined by the President, having regard to advice from the whips and an informal roster agreed to by the parties and independent senators. A proposal to debate or discuss a matter must be supported by four or more senators (not including the proposer) when the President reports the proposal to the Senate.

Time limit: 30 minutes for each proposal, for up to 2 proposals each day. Each senator may speak for up to 5 minutes.

Guides to Senate procedure

[9. Matters of public importance or urgency](#)

DEBATING DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS

Consideration of documents tabled earlier in the day

MONDAY after the MPIs/ urgency motions	TUESDAY after the MPIs/ urgency motions	WEDNESDAY after the MPIs/ urgency motions	
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Debate on documents presented at the start of the day's sitting, which are listed on the **Red**.

The Chair will generally indicate which documents are being considered. Senators may move motions in the form "That the Senate take note of the document", or may speak to that motion if another senator has already moved it. Debate on one document must be completed, or adjourned to another day, before the Senate moves to the next document.

Time limit: 30 minutes; 5 minutes per contribution

Ministerial statements

MONDAY after documents	TUESDAY after committee reports	WEDNESDAY after committee reports	THURSDAY after committee reports and documents
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Ministers may make statements to the Senate about any matter within their responsibilities. The making or tabling of ministerial statements typically occurs at this point in the day, but may occur at other times when no other business is before the Senate.

Senators may move motions in the form "That the Senate take note of <the statement>", or may speak to that motion if it has already been moved. Debate on one statement must be completed, or adjourned to another day, before the Senate moves to the next.

Time limit: 30 minutes per statement; 10 minutes per contribution; 60 minutes total

Tabling of committee reports and government responses

	TUESDAY after documents	WEDNESDAY after documents	THURSDAY after motions to take note of answers
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On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, time is available for presenting and debating committee reports and government responses to committee reports. These are generally listed on the **Red**, although other reports and government responses will occasionally be presented.

Generally, reports are tabled by or on behalf of the committee chair, who would usually move a motion to take note of the report (although any senator may move that motion). Other senators may speak to the motion, for up to 10 minutes. Where there are numerous reports on any given day, the Whips' offices may make informal arrangements to allocate speaking times. When that happens, precedence in debate may be given to members of the relevant committee ahead of other senators.

Government responses to committee reports may also be presented by a minister at this time, generally after reports are presented, and may be debated on the same terms.

Finally, reports and responses tabled out of session will be called on for debate. These will be listed on the **Red**.

Note that reports on bills referred through the Selection of Bills Committee are not listed for tabling and debate at this time. By convention, the content of such reports is debated when the subject legislation is itself before the Senate. If committee reports are tabled at some other time in the program, leave would be required to move to take note.

Time limit: 10 minutes per contribution; 60 minutes total (on Thursday, consideration of documents and reports listed on the *Notice Paper* is also included in the 60 minute total).

Reports and documents on the Notice Paper

			THURSDAY after motions to take note
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On Thursdays an hour is set aside in the afternoon for the tabling and consideration of committee reports (see page 6) followed by further debate on reports, government responses, documents and Auditor-General’s reports tabled on previous sitting days and reserved on the *Notice Paper*. Senators may speak for 5 minutes on any document or report reserved on the *Notice Paper*.

The Chair will typically call on documents “page-by-page” by reference to their numbers on the *Notice Paper*. Senators should seek the call and indicate to the chair which document they wish to speak to.

Generally there will already be motions to take note listed on the *Notice Paper*. (Technically these are “orders of the day” for the resumption of debate on motions previously moved.) Senators can speak to that motion. Occasionally reports and documents will be listed on the *Notice Paper* for Consideration, and no motion will be listed. In that case, a senator wishing to speak to a document should seek the call and move a motion to take note, to commence the debate. In practice, senators seek the call and speak, and the Chair will make sure the procedural intricacies are dealt with.

Debate on one document must be completed, or adjourned to another day, before the Senate moves to the next document.

Time limit: 10 minutes per contribution on presentation of a committee report, 5 minutes per contribution on a document or report reserved on the *Notice Paper*; 60 minutes total.

Key phrases for debating documents etc.:

- I move to take note of the document/report: commences debate
- I also wish to take note of the document/report: continues debate on the same document
- [at the end of a contribution] If no other senator wishes to speak, then I seek leave to continue my remarks—adjourns the debate until the next sitting Thursday
- [if not speaking] I move that the debate be adjourned – adjourns debate until the next sitting Thursday
- [from the Chair] The time for this debate has expired. Senator, you will be in continuation when the debate resumes [ie the following Thursday]

Senators will often be prompted by the Chair – “Would you like to seek leave to continue your remarks?” in order to keep the document on the *Notice Paper* for other senators to speak on at a later date. The customary response is “Yes, Chair, I seek leave to continue my remarks.”

Guides to Senate procedure

[11. Opportunities for debating documents and reports](#)

Committee membership

MONDAY afternoon	TUESDAY afternoon	WEDNESDAY afternoon	THURSDAY after formal business (before 12.15 pm)
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The Senate determines which senators will be appointed to Senate and joint committees. The President reports letters from party leaders and independent senators proposing to appoint or discharge senators to committees, and calls on a minister to move a motion to give effect to those proposals. Such motions are moved by leave (unanimous consent of all senators present), but it is rare for leave to be denied as these motions are not usually controversial.

The text of the motion will generally be linked from the **Dynamic Red** prior to being moved, or will be available from the Table Office or chamber attendants. Although listed on the **Red** at the times shown, motions about committee membership may also be moved at other times.

If there are two or more candidates vying for a spot on a committee, a ballot is held at a time determined by the President to suit the convenience of the Senate.

Guides to Senate procedure

[14. Committee membership](#)

Messages from the House of Representatives

MONDAY afternoon	TUESDAY afternoon	WEDNESDAY afternoon	THURSDAY after formal business (before 12.15 pm)
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The two Houses formally communicate to each other by messages signed by the President and the Speaker. Sometimes these messages will be for information only, but many of them request the concurrence of one House in the work of the other (for instance, messages asking the Senate to consider bills passed by the House).

The President generally reports messages from the House at the times shown, although messages may be reported at other times to suit the convenience of the Senate or the government's program.

Guides to Senate procedure

[18. Communication between the Houses – dealing with messages](#)

Business of the Senate (if any)

MONDAY afternoon	TUESDAY afternoon	WEDNESDAY afternoon	THURSDAY after formal business (before 12.15 pm)
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Presentation of reports and debate on motions given precedence above government business. Business is generally listed on the **Red** and may include the types of business listed below.

Matters of Privilege: proposals to refer matters to the Privileges Committee. An item will only fall into this category if the President has determined that the matter should have special priority under [standing order 81](#).

Business of the Senate orders requiring the presentation of committee reports. If reports are tabled at this time, senators require leave if they wish to move motions to take note. By convention, the content of reports on legislation is debated when the subject legislation is itself before the Senate, so leave to take note at this point will ordinarily be refused.

Disallowance motions: either notices of motion to disallow instruments, or orders of the day to resume debate on such motions. These debates are subject to the general rules of debate, with up to 15 minutes per speaker and no overall time limit. Sometimes – particularly when it is the last day to determine the disallowance motion – the Senate may impose a strict time limit.

Committee references: either notices of motion to refer matters to committees, or orders of the day to resume debate on such motions. These debates are typically subject to the general rules of debate, with up to 15 minutes per speaker and no overall time limit. The exception is proposals to refer bills to committees, which have a 30 minute time limit, with 5 minutes per speaker: [standing order 115\(6\)](#). In practice, these motions are routinely fast-tracked as formal business (see *above*).

Guides to Senate procedure

[4. Categories of business](#)

[13. Referring matters to committees](#)

[19. Disallowance](#)

[20. Parliamentary privilege](#)

General business

			THURSDAY after reports and documents
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Debate on motions or bills from private senators. The item or items for debate are set on the motion of the Manager of Government Business, following a schedule informally determined between non-government parties and independent senators. General time limits apply, with up to 15 minutes per speaker.

As with all motions, the question is put at the conclusion of the debate. However, if a division is called for after 4.30 pm, the division is deferred till the next day of sitting.

Time limit: until 5.30 pm

Guides to Senate procedure

[4. Categories of business](#)

Adjournment debate

MONDAY

8 pm

TUESDAY

7.30 pm

WEDNESDAY

7.30 pm

THURSDAY

5.30 pm

The motion “That the Senate do now adjourn” is proposed from the chair and may be debated. Senators may address any topic they choose.

Time limits: vary according to the day:

- Monday: 30 mins total; 5 min speeches
- Tuesday: open-ended; 5 and 10 min speeches
- Wednesday: 30 mins total, 5 min speeches
- Thursday: 30 mins total; 5 and 10 minute speeches