



Procedural Information Bulletin

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For the sitting period 18 to 28 March 2024

The Senate and senators

When the Senate met on 18 March, the President informed the Senate of the death of Senator Linda White, a senator for the State of Victoria, following a period of illness. The Senate resolved to set the following day aside for a condolence motion. Following the usual practices of the Senate, no other business was conducted on that day and the Senate adjourned as a mark of respect.

Senators Sharma and Ghosh made their first speeches on 20 and 25 March, respectively, while valedictory statements were made on 26 March in relation to Senator Rice, pending her resignation from the Senate ahead of its next sittings.

Early in the sittings, the government proposed a motion to dispense with the sitting day on 28 March; the day before Good Friday. The proposal met universal support.

Legislation

Some 21 government bills passed the Senate, including 14 passed under a guillotine on the last sitting day.

A Treasury laws amendment bill related to [taxation arrangements for multinational entities](#) passed with government amendments, including an amendment further amended on the initiative of the Australian Greens. The Senate also passed amendments proposed by Senator David Pocock, which the government supported, and proposed by Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, which the government opposed. When the bill was dealt with in the House of Representatives, the government accepted all the Senate's amendments.

Another Treasury laws amendment bill, this time dealing with [support for small business and charities](#), was also amended against the government's wishes, by way of opposition amendments to extend its provisions to medium sized businesses. The House had not considered the Senate's amendments at the end of the sittings.

The [Digital ID Bill 2023](#) (incidentally, the shortest bill title since the Spam Bill 2003) was passed with government amendments and with amendments circulated by the Australian Greens. The bill establishes an accreditation scheme for entities providing digital ID services, and introduce new privacy safeguards and governance arrangements. The government amendments responded to the Economics Legislation Committee report on the bill and comments from the Scrutiny of Bills Committee. The amendments from the Australian Greens sought to improve the inclusivity of the scheme by making it more accessible for individuals who experience barriers when creating or using a digital ID.

On 26 March the government introduced the [Migration \(Removal and Other Measures\) Bill 2024](#) into the House, insisting that it was an urgent bill that had to be passed before the week was out. In the Senate, the Opposition successfully moved to suspend standing orders to direct the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee to hold a hearing on the bill later that day to take evidence from officials of the Department of Home Affairs. Crossbench senators sought to amend that motion to instead refer the bill to that committee for a longer inquiry. Those amendments were unsuccessful, but the Senate supported the direction to the committee. The following day, after the hearing, the Opposition supported a proposal from the Australian Greens to refer the bill to the committee, after Senator Shoebridge successfully suspended standing orders for that purpose. The Senate adopted a compromise reporting date of 7 May, proposed by the Opposition, rather than the longer reference initially proposed by the Greens. The bill was also removed from the list of bills the government had been seeking to guillotine. It was later introduced and adjourned to the next sitting period, in accordance with usual practice.

Urgency motions

Under standing order 75(6), an urgency motion proposed for debate on any day may not be amended. In other words, a senator seeking to move an amendment to an urgency motion requires leave of the Senate to do so. Any senator may object to the granting of leave, in which case leave is refused. For many years, senators have had contingent notices on the Notice Paper to allow them to move to suspend standing orders when leave to move such an amendment is refused.

On 26 March, while debating an urgency motion moved by Senator Steele-John, the Leader of the Government in the Senate, Senator Wong, was granted leave to move an amendment. After moving and speaking to the amendment, Senator Wong moved the closure motion – that the question on the amendment be put – and it was agreed to on the voices. The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator Birmingham, sought leave to move an amendment to the amended urgency motion, but leave was refused. Using his contingent notice, Senator Birmingham moved “That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent him moving the amendment” and debate ensued on the suspension motion. Senator Chandler moved closure on the motion, which was lost in a division, 22 votes to 29. The time for the debate then expired and the suspension motion lapsed. This is in accordance with the general rule that suspension motions lapse if the question is not put before time expires for any given debate. It is also in accordance with precedent and practice on urgency motions, as described in *Odgers’ Australian Senate Practice*, 14th ed, at p. 246. The chair explained the precedent and then put the question on the amended urgency motion, which was passed in a division, 29 votes to 22.

Orders for documents and explanations

The Minister representing the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme continued to provide explanations at the start of proceedings each week on the failure to table the National Disability Insurance Scheme financial sustainability framework (see [Bulletins 374](#) to [379](#)).

The Senate made nine new orders for documents in the sitting period including orders relating to: national competition reform (20 March), information on payments to institutional investors provided by Housing Australia (26 March) and reports produced by the Bureau of Meteorology relating to its ROBUST program (26 March).

Additionally, the Senate made six orders concerning unsatisfactory compliance with earlier orders. Two related to the provision of documents on a confidential basis to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) concerning the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Senate twice

rejected the PII claim advanced by the minister on the grounds that the claim did not address the apprehended harm that could result from the confidential provision of documents to the PJCIS. The responsible minister was ordered to attend on 27 March to provide an explanation. The Senate rejected other PII claims on similar grounds in relation to orders concerning the National Legal Assistance Partnership and the Afghanistan Inquiry Implementation Oversight Panel.

The cumulative list of orders and responses can be found on the [Senate's business pages](#).

Inquiries

Eight bill inquiries were established as a result of [Report No. 3 of 2024](#) and [Report No. 4 of 2024](#) of the Selection of Bills Committee, including referral of a private senator's bill, the [Competition and Consumer \(Divestiture Powers\) Bill 2024](#) to the [Select Committee on Supermarket Prices](#). As noted earlier in this bulletin, the provisions of the [Migration Amendment \(Removal and Other Measures\) Bill 2024](#) were separately referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee.

Four new inquiries were referred to references committees:

- [Glencore's proposed carbon capture and storage project](#) was referred to the Environment and Communications Committee for inquiry and report by 1 May 2024;
- [Shutdown of the 3G mobile network](#) was referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee for inquiry and report by 30 November 2024;
- [Excess mortality data](#) was referred to the Community Affairs Committee for inquiry and report by 31 August 2024; and
- [Australian support for Ukraine](#) was referred to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee for inquiry and report by 4 August 2024.

On 26 March, on a motion moved on behalf of Senators Ayres, Shoebridge and David Pocock, the Senate established the [Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence](#) to inquire into the opportunities and impacts for Australia arising out of the uptake of AI technologies. The resolution establishing the committee provides for the committee to comprise six senators (two from Government, two from Opposition, one from the Australian Greens, and one minor party or independent senator) and to be chaired by a Government senator. The position of Deputy Chair is to be filled by a Greens, minor party or independent senator.

The establishment of the committee followed earlier notices given by Senator McGrath (on 26 February) for the establishment of a Joint Select Committee on the Opportunities and Threats Arising from Artificial Intelligence, later withdrawn, and on 18 March for the establishment of a Senate Select Committee. The Senate Select Committee was proposed to consist of eight senators—three from Opposition, three from Government and two minority or minor party senators—with the committee to be chaired by an Opposition senator and the Deputy Chair to be an independent or minority party senator.

When the Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence was established, Senator McGrath unsuccessfully moved to amend the motion for the position of Deputy Chair to be filled by an Opposition senator.

Reports and Additional Estimates hearings

Two bill reports were tabled by legislation committees and six reports were presented out of session prior to the sitting period. The Finance and Public Administration References Committee tabled an [interim report](#) on its inquiry into management and assurance of integrity by consulting services. This report detailed the committee's view that following its June 2023 report into the matter, PwC Australia

has not made sufficient progress complying with the two recommendations made by the committee in that earlier report that PwC:

- publish accurate and detailed information about the involvement of PwC partners and staff in the breach of confidential government information; and
- cooperate fully with any investigations.

In addition, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement tabled its [report](#) on a visit to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation.

Annual Reports (no. 1 of 2024) were tabled by seven out of eight of the legislation committees and five of the committees tabled their reports on Additional Estimates 2023-24. Community Affairs, Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport, and Legal and Constitutional Affairs all sought and received extensions of time to report on their Additional Estimates to allow further hearings, which took place over the sitting weeks.

RELATED RESOURCES

[Dynamic Red](#) – updated continuously during the sitting day, the Dynamic Red displays the results of proceedings as they happen.

[Senate Daily Summary](#) – a convenient summary of each day's proceedings in the Senate, with links to source documents.

Like this bulletin, these documents can be found on the Senate website: www.aph.gov.au/senate

Inquiries: **Clerk's Office (02) 6277 3364**