

Sessions of a parliament

The period of time between the first meeting of the House of Representatives following a general election and its expiry or dissolution (ending) for the next election is called 'a Parliament' and lasts for a maximum of three years. Each term of parliament is then divided into sessions.

The first session of a parliament starts on the first day that the parliament sits following a general election (see Infosheet No. 9 *A new parliament*) and ends when the parliament is prorogued or dissolved.

Prior to 1977, the number and duration of sessions in a term of parliament varied considerably. It is now the usual practice for parliaments to consist of only one session. The exception to this was the 44th Parliament, which had two sessions after being prorogued in 2016.

Proroguing the parliament

Prorogation is the process of formally closing a session of parliament. While prorogation ends a session of parliament, it does not end the parliament itself. Section 5 of the Constitution gives the Governor-General authority to prorogue the parliament. However, in practice the Governor-General follows the advice of the Prime Minister of the day.

Since 1906 all prorogations have been made by proclamation published in the Commonwealth Gazette. It is commonplace for the Official Secretary to the Governor-General to read the proclamation, usually accompanied by the Clerk and Deputy Clerk of the House and the Serjeant-at-Arms. Since 1977 proclamations have been read publicly at the front of Parliament House.

When a parliament is prorogued, all proceedings come to an end—that is, all business on the Notice Paper lapses (see Infosheet No. 12 *Finding out about the House*). In addition, the House does not sit, and certain committees no longer meet and transact business.

There is little constitutional guidance as to when or how often prorogation should take place. In recent times, prorogation has usually only occurred immediately prior to dissolution (see next section), meaning that the parliamentary term consists of only one session.



The Official Secretary to the Governor-General reading a proclamation to both prorogue the 46th parliament and dissolve the House of Representatives.

Prorogations not preceding the dissolution of parliament—recent examples

Since 1961, there have only been six prorogations that have not immediately preceded the dissolution of parliament. Specific circumstances applying at the time included:

- the 1968 prorogation followed the death of Prime Minister Holt, which meant it was necessary to form a new ministry
- parliament was prorogued in both 1974 and 1977 to enable the Queen to open new sessions of parliament when visiting Australia
- the 2016 prorogation occurred on advice from the Prime Minister to the Governor-General, to enable the parliament to give full and timely consideration to important parcels of legislation. The second session ended when the Prime Minister advised the Governor-General to call a double dissolution (see Infosheet No. 18 *Double Dissolution*).

Table 1 (see p. 3) details the terms and sessions of Australian parliaments since 1901.

Dissolving the House of Representatives

The duration of a parliament is directly related to the duration of the House of Representatives. While a parliament can continue until the House of Representatives expires (three years from the date of its first meeting), it is more common for it to be dissolved by the Governor-General earlier than this.

Dissolution of the House terminates a parliament and triggers a general election.

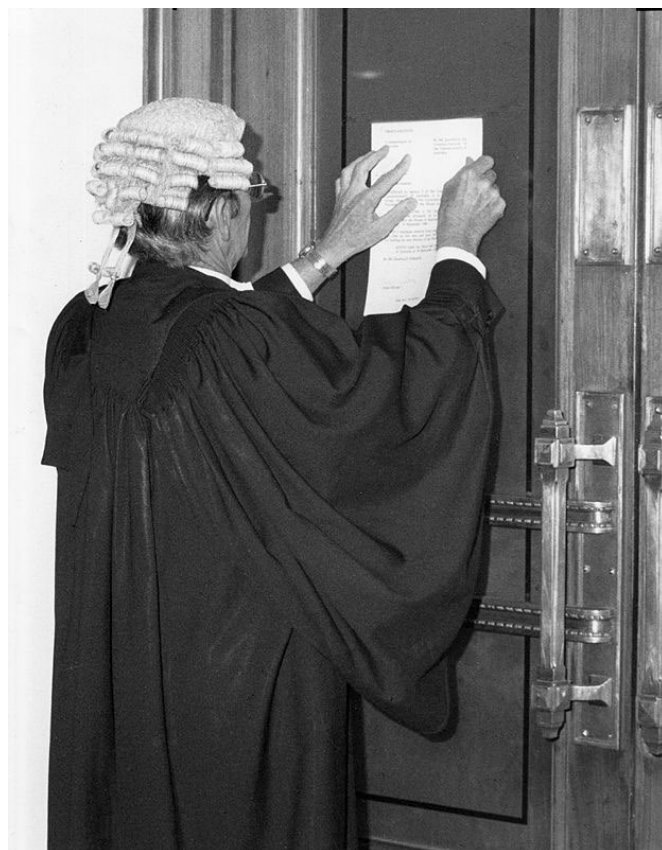
The provisions of the Constitution means that it is the House that is regularly dissolved for electoral purposes, not the Senate (which is continuous in character except in the circumstances of a double dissolution). In practice, the Senate has never met after the House has been dissolved.

The Governor-General's authority to dissolve the parliament is set out in section 5 of the Constitution. By convention, the Governor-General takes this action on the advice of the Prime Minister of the day.

Since 1993, the Governor-General has agreed to prorogue the parliament on the same day as the House is dissolved. Similar to prorogation, dissolution is effected by a proclamation published in the Commonwealth Gazette and usually read by the Official Secretary to the Governor-General. In recent years, when the prorogation and dissolution have occurred on the same day, the Parliament has been prorogued and the House dissolved by a single proclamation.

After the proclamation has been read, the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Serjeant-at-Arms return to the entrance to the House Chamber and the Clerk posts a copy of the proclamation at the door to the Chamber. An artillery salute may be fired at the precise time of dissolution to mark the end of the parliament.

The decision to dissolve a parliament carries more significance than the decision to prorogue a parliament. Upon dissolution of the House, all its proceedings come to an end. Further, members of the House cease to be members, sessional orders no longer have effect and committees cease to exist. Ministers continue in office and the Speaker continues to hold that position for administrative purposes, until a Speaker is elected in the next parliament.



The Clerk of the House of Representatives pinning the proclamation of dissolution for the 31st Parliament to the House of Representatives Chamber door.

Double dissolution

When there is continued disagreement between the House and the Senate about a proposed law, the Governor-General has, in certain circumstances, the power to dissolve both Houses simultaneously (a 'double dissolution'). For more information on double dissolutions, see Infosheet No. 18 *Double Dissolution*.

On the occasion of a simultaneous dissolution of both Houses, Senate Clerks and the Usher of the Black Rod have also attended the reading of the proclamation.

For more information

House of Representatives Practice, 7th edn, Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, 2018, pp. 226–35; 825–29.

Images courtesy of AUSPIC and Department of the House of Representatives.

Table 1. Terms and sessions of Parliaments

For more information, see *House of Representatives Practice*, 7th edn, Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, 2018, Appendix 15, pp.825–29.

Parliament	Dates of Session	Prorogation	Dissolution
First Parliament			
First Session	9.5.1901–10.10.1902	10.10.1902*	
Second Session	26.5.1903–22.10.1903	22.10.1903*	23.11.1903
Second Parliament			
First Session	2.3.1904–15.12.1904	15.12.1904*	
Second Session	28.6.1905–21.12.1905	21.12.1905*	
Third Session	7.6.1906–12.10.1916	12.10.1906*	5.11.1906
Third Parliament			
First Session	20.2.1907–21.2.1907	22.2.1907*	
Second Session	3.7.1907–5.6.1908	11.6.1908*	
Third Session	16.9.1908–11.12.1908	15.12.1908*	
Fourth Session	26.5.1909–8.12.1909	13.12.1909*	19.2.1910 (expired)
Fourth Parliament			
First Session	1.7.1910–25.11.1910	29.11.1910*	
Second Session	5.9.1911–21.12.1911	22.12.1911*	
Third Session	19.6.1912–21.12.1912	8.1.1913*	23.4.1913
Fifth Parliament			
First Session	9.7.1913–19.12.1913	19.12.1913*	
Second Session	15.4.1914–26.6.1914	27.6.1914	30.7.1914#
Sixth Parliament			
First Session	5.9.1914–17.3.1917	20.3.1917	26.3.1917
Seventh Parliament			
First Session	14.6.1917–14.6.1917	16.6.1917	
Second Session	11.7.1917–24.10.1919	28.10.1919	3.11.1919
Eighth Parliament			
First Session	26.2.1920–10.12.1921	5.1.1922*	
Second Session	28.6.1922–14.10.1919	18.10.1920	6.11.1922
Ninth Parliament			
First Session	28.2.1923–9.3.1923	21.3.1923*	
Second Session	13.6.1923–10.10.1924	30.4.1925	
Third Session	10.6.1925–25.9.1925	28.9.1925	3.10.1925
Tenth Parliament			
First Session	13.1.1926–22.9.1928		9.10.1928
Eleventh Parliament			
First Session	6.2.1929–12.9.1929		16.9.1929
Twelfth Parliament			
First Session	20.11.1929–26.11.1931		27.11.1931
Thirteenth Parliament			
First Session	17.2.1932–2.8.1934		7.8.1934

Parliament	Dates of Session	Prorogation	Dissolution
Fourteenth Parliament			
First Session	23.10.1934–11.12.1936	27.5.1937	
Second Session	17.6.1937–15.9.1937		21.9.1937
Fifteenth Parliament			
First Session	30.11.1937–8.12.1939	14.3.1940	
Second Session	17.4.1940–22.8.1940		27.8.1940
Sixteenth Parliament			
First Session	20.11.1940–1.7.1943		7.7.1943
Seventeenth Parliament			
First Session	23.9.1943–31.3.1944	5.7.1944	
Second Session	17.7.1944–1.12.1944	8.2.1945	
Third Session	21.2.1945–9.8.1946		16.8.1946
Eighteenth Parliament			
First Session	6.11.1946–18.6.1948	4.8.1948	
Second Session	1.9.1948–27.10.1949		16.8.1946
Nineteenth Parliament			
First Session	22.2.1950–16.3.1951		19.3.1951#
Twentieth Parliament			
First Session	12.6.1951–22.10.1953	30.10.1953	
Second Session	10.11.1953–3.12.1953	4.2.1954	
Third Session	15.2.1954–14.4.1954		21.4.1954
Twenty-first Parliament			
First Session	4.8.1954–28.10.1955		4.11.1955
Twenty-second Parliament			
First Session	15.2.1956–8.11.1956	7.3.1957	
Second Session	19.3.1957–5.12.1957	11.2.1958	
Third Session	25.2.1958–2.10.1958		14.10.1958
Twenty-third Parliament			
First Session	17.2.1959–3.12.1959	10.2.1960	
Second Session	8.3.1960–9.12.1960	20.2.1961	
Third Session	7.3.1961–27.10.1961		14.10.1958
Twenty-fourth Parliament			
First Session	20.2.1962–30.10.1963		1.11.1963
Twenty-fifth Parliament			
First Session	25.2.1964–28.10.1966		31.10.1966
Twenty-sixth Parliament			
First Session	21.2.1967–9.11.1967	9.2.1968	
Second Session	12.3.1968–26.9.1969		29.9.1969
Twenty-seventh Parliament			
First Session	25.1.1969–26.11.1969	23.2.1970	
Second Session	3.3.1970–26.10.1972		2.11.1972
Twenty-eighth Parliament			
First Session	27.2.1973–13.12.1973	14.2.1974	
Second Session	28.2.1974–10.4.1974		11.4.1974#
Twenty-ninth Parliament			
First Session	9.7.1974–11.11.1975		11.11.1975#

Parliament	Dates of Session	Prorogation	Dissolution
Thirtieth Parliament			
First Session	17.2.1976–24.2.1977	28.2.1977	
Second Session	8.3.1977–8.11.1977		10.11.1977
Thirty-first Parliament			
First Session	21.2.1978–18.9.1980		19.9.1980
Thirty-second Parliament			
First Session	25.11.1980–15.12.1982		4.2.1983#
Thirty-third Parliament			
First Session	21.4.1938–11.10.1984		26.10.1984
Thirty-fourth Parliament			
First Session	21.2.1985–4.6.1987		5.6.1987#
Thirty-fifth Parliament			
First Session	14.9.1987–22.12.1989		19.2.1990
Thirty-sixth Parliament			
First Session	8.5.1990–18.12.1992	8.2.1993	8.2.1993
Thirty-seventh Parliament			
First Session	4.5.1933–1.12.1995	29.1.1996	29.1.1996
Thirty-eight Parliament			
First Session	30.4.1996–15.7.1998	31.8.1998	31.8.1998
Thirty-ninth Parliament			
First Session	10.11.1998–27.9.2001	8.10.2001	8.10.2001
Fortieth Parliament			
First Session	12.2.2002–13.8.2004	31.8.2004	31.8.2004
Forty-first Parliament			
First Session	16.11.2004–20.9.2007	15.10.2007	17.10.2007
Forty-second Parliament			
First Session	12.2.2008–24.6.2010	19.7.2010	19.7.2010
Forty-third Parliament			
First Session	28.9.2010–27.6.2013	5.8.2013	5.8.2013
Forty-fourth Parliament			
First Session	12.11.2013–18.3.2016	15.4.2016	
Second Session	18.4.2016–5.5.2016		9.5.2016#
Forty-fifth Parliament			
First Session	30.8.2016–4.4.2019	11.4.2019	11.4.2019
Forty-sixth Parliament			
First Session	2.7.2019–31.3.2022	11.4.2022	11.4.2022
Forty-seventh Parliament			
First Session	26.7.2022–present		

* Further prorogations were effected following the initial prorogation date

Double dissolution