

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 29 MAY 2008

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(71) Output 2.3: Australian Citizenship

Senator Barnett (L&CA 45) asked:

In relation to citizenship ceremonies provide information on who presides, or who will decide who will preside; and with the minister's speech and address to the forum, who will be invited or who may be invited, is it always delegated to a government senator or member.

Answer:

Presiding Officer

Under the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* a person before whom the pledge is made (the presiding officer) must be authorised by the Minister responsible for citizenship.

The majority of Australian citizenship ceremonies are conducted by local government councils. Generally, the mayor, general manager or CEO of a council have authorisation to preside at these ceremonies.

Since 2004, members of the House of Representatives (MPs) have been given, on request, a standing authorisation to preside at Australian citizenship ceremonies. In April 2008 this was extended to senators. A standing authorisation obviates the need for ministerial approval each time an MP or senator wishes to preside at a ceremony.

Community organisations also conduct citizenship ceremonies, particularly on special days such as Australia Day and Citizenship Day. Community organisations often invite local members of parliament to preside at these ceremonies.

The presiding officer generally:

- delivers the opening address;
- reads the preamble for citizenship ceremonies;
- administers the Australian citizenship pledge to candidates;
- presents certificates/gifts to the new citizens; and
- signs the citizenship pledge verification list at the conclusion of the ceremony.

Invitations to ceremonies

Citizenship ceremonies are conducted in accordance with the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code (the Code) which is produced by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The Code sets out the legal and other requirements, as well as the roles and responsibilities, for those conducting citizenship ceremonies. The Code is available publicly on the Australian citizenship website www.citizenship.gov.au.

The Code states that, in addition to the federal Minister responsible for citizenship, citizenship ceremony organisers must invite representatives from all three tiers of government:

- the local federal member/s of parliament;
- a senator from a different political party to that of the local federal member;
- the local member/s of the state or territory parliament; and
- representatives from local government.

If the Minister is unable to attend a ceremony, he/she may nominate a representative. The representative may be a Government member of the House of Representatives, a Government senator or another person deemed appropriate by the Minister.

The focus is on the invitation of elected representatives. Invited elected representatives cannot send a representative to act in an official capacity on their behalf.

Local representatives or leaders of community, religious or Indigenous organisations may also be invited.

Speeches

The Code states that when the Minister attends a ceremony, the Minister must be invited to speak immediately after the opening address.

When the Minister's representative attends the ceremony, he/she must read the Minister's message. When neither the Minister nor his/her representative attend a ceremony, the Minister's message must be read by the presiding officer.

Following the Minister's message, other invited guests may be invited to speak. All elected local representatives at the federal, state or territory and local government level should over time have an opportunity to provide a welcoming speech. In order to keep the number of speeches manageable, not all elected representatives should speak at every ceremony.

Subject to the number of speeches by elected representatives, members of local organisations and/or celebrities may also be invited to speak.