

SENATORS

There are 76 senators in the Senate; twelve senators represent each state and two senators represent each territory.

A person elected to the Senate is called a senator. Along with members of the House of Representatives, senators may also be referred to as members of parliament. The duties of a senator are conducted both within the Parliament and their state or territory.

Parliamentary role

During sitting weeks (about 18 to 20 weeks a year), senators are engaged in parliamentary duties, including:

- debating and voting on bills (proposed laws)
- representing state/territory views in Parliament
- working on parliamentary committees that examine important issues
- attending parliamentary party meetings to decide on party policy
- scrutinising (closely examining) the work of the government
- discussing issues of national and international importance.

State/territory role

When Parliament is not sitting, senators are engaged in duties in their states or territories, including:

- working on parliamentary committees to collect information from community organisations and lobby groups that want to present their views to Parliament
- helping constituents who may be having difficulties with issues such as taxes, immigration, health or pensions
- speaking with community groups such as pensioner associations and sporting clubs
- visiting schools and making presentations
- meeting with constituents and taking their views back to Parliament.

Working hours

Senators work long hours, both in Parliament and in their states or territories. Parliament meets for an average of eleven hours a day. However, senators may begin their day in Parliament House at about 7am and end their day at 10pm or later. Senators also spend many hours travelling, both between their state or territory and Parliament House and throughout their state or territory.



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Top: The Senate in session

Above: Senator the Hon Penny Wong speaks in the Senate

Period of service

State senators are elected for a period of six years using a system of rotation that ensures that only half the state senators end their term every three years. Half-Senate elections are usually held at the same time as elections for the House of Representatives, though they do not have to be.

Territory senators are elected for a period of three years at the same time as the members of the House of Representatives and half the Senate.

Senators can stand for re-election as many times as they like (see *Federal Elections*).

Addressing a senator

In the Senate, senators are referred to by:

- their last name – for example, *Senator Jones*, or
- if applicable, their ministry or shadow ministry – for example, the *Minister for Immigration*.

Some senators who are or have been ministers or Presiding Officers may also use the title of ‘the Honourable’, abbreviated to ‘the Hon’.

History

Section 24 of the Australian Constitution states that the number of members of the House of Representatives shall be, as near as possible, ‘twice the number of senators’. The first Senate in 1901 had 36 senators, as set out in the Constitution. This number has steadily increased since then.

The longest-serving senator was Senator Sir George Pearce, who was a senator from 1901 to 1938.

LINKS

PEO website

Fact Sheet: *Parliament*

www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets/parliament.html

APH website

Senate Brief: *The Role of the Senate*

www.aph.gov.au/Senate/briefs/brief10



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Top and above: Senators working in the Senate