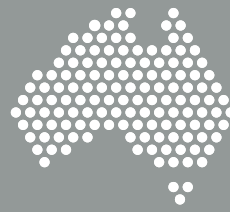


Teacher Reference Document 57



AUSTRALIAN
CONSTITUTION
CENTRE

Unit 7: The Australian Constitution and its three key institutions of government and how the Separation of Powers (SoP) protects democracy and the people – Years 6 and 7 - C & C Strand: Government & Democracy

Topic 6.3 & 7.1: The Australian Constitution and its three Key Institutions of Government

Introducing the Australian Parliament: The Houses of the Parliament (Student Resource)

The Australian Government is also called the Federal Government or the Commonwealth Government. The Government is run by Ministers who are elected members of the Australian Parliament. The Parliament has two Houses:

- the House of Representatives
- the Senate

The Parliament's main purpose is to make laws for the good of the people. In a federal election, Australian citizens vote to elect representatives to each House of Parliament.

The House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is also known as the Lower House or the People's House. Australia is divided into federal electorates. Members of Parliament (MPs) represent the people in their electorate. The number of MPs for each state and territory is based on the proportionate number of people in that state or territory, except that each original State gets a guaranteed minimum of five MPs. Overall, there are over 151 members elected to the House of Representatives. Members debate proposals for new laws in the Australian Parliament. The role of the House is to consider, debate, and vote on proposals for new laws or changes to existing laws, and discuss matters of national importance. The Government is formed from the party or parties that hold the 'confidence' (i.e. the support) of this House.



The House of Representatives
Source: Wiki Commons

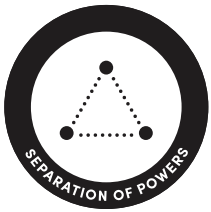
The Senate

The [Senate](#) is the other House in the Australian Parliament. The Senate is sometimes called the Upper House, the House of Review or the States' House. Voters from each state elect senators to represent them in the Senate. All states are equally represented in the Senate regardless of their size or population. There is a total of 76 senators. Each state elects 12 senators, and the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory elect two senators each. There is currently a discussion about whether territory representation in the Senate should be increased.

Senators also consider, debate and vote on new laws or changes to the laws, and discuss matters of national importance.



The Senate
Source: Wiki Commons



Topic 6.3 Lesson Three



AUSTRALIAN
CONSTITUTION
CENTRE

The Houses of the Parliament

Time/Lesson

- 1 hour

Learning Goal

Students will understand the differences between the two Houses of the Australian Parliament.

Teaching Reference Documents:

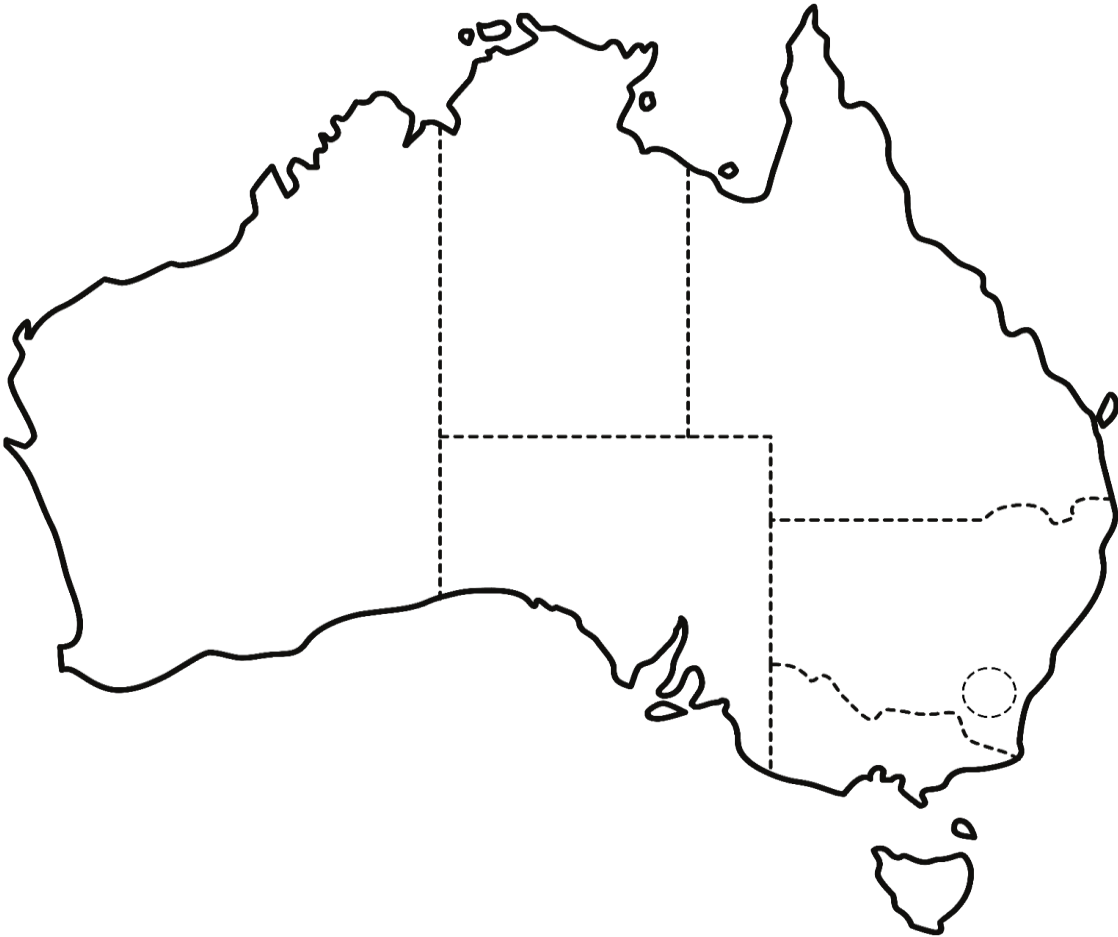
TRD 57 [Introducing the Australian Parliament: The Houses of the Parliament \(Student Resource\)](#)

Teacher Instruction

Lesson outlines and guiding questions:

- Students identify the differences between representation in the two Houses of Parliament and draw a table comparing them.
- Students investigate why representation in the lower House is based on population while representation in the upper House is equal amongst the States (with less representation for the Territories). Ask students to consider: Why was it important to give States equal representation in the upper House at the time of federation? Would States with smaller populations have refused to join the Federation if they feared that the States with bigger populations could gang up against them and defeat them in a Parliament where representation was based solely on population? Why does each 'original State' get a minimum of five Members in the House of Representatives, even though representation is otherwise based on population? Was this done to encourage Western Australia to join as an 'original State' before 1 January 1901, because if it joined later, it would not get these minimum guarantees? Is it fair that Tasmanian voters have proportionately greater representation in the Senate than the voters of New South Wales? If the Northern Territory became a State, would it get a guaranteed 12 Senators and a minimum of 5 Members in the House of Representatives, and should it have that level of representation, given its population?
- Students mark on a map of Australia the number of voters in each of the States and Territories, using figures obtained from the Australian Electoral Commission. Students then mark on the map how many Members of the House of Representatives are elected from each State and Territory and how many Senators are elected from each State and Territory. They compare the jurisdictions with the highest and lowest number of representatives compared with population. This could be done in conjunction with a mathematics lesson, as students could be shown how to work out the proportionate value of a voter's vote in different jurisdictions.
- There has been debate in recent times as to whether the Australian Capital Territory should gain greater representation in Parliament, due to its population. Looking at the figures students have already collected and considering public commentary on the question which can be found online, ask students to prepare a list of arguments for and against giving the ACT more representation in Parliament.
- Discuss the slogan 'one vote, one value'. On the one hand, fairness requires people to be treated equally and for each vote to have an equal value. But on the other hand, sometimes differences need to be taken into account so that people have fair access to representation. What about people who live in remote areas? If every electorate had exactly the same number of voters, that would make some electorates, especially in Western Australia, so enormous that their Member of Parliament could not properly represent all the people and most people wouldn't be able to visit and speak to their Member if they needed to do so. Students brainstorm how this can be balanced so representation in the lower House is fair for all.

Representation in the Australian Parliament



1. Name each State and Territory on the map
2. Mark the number of electors (i.e. voters) in each State or Territory
3. Mark the number of Senators to be elected in each State or Territory
4. Mark the number of Members of House of Representatives to be elected in each State and Territory
5. Compare the number of voters with the number of elected representatives in the different States and Territories.