

I need more information - where can I go?

Contact the Australian Electoral Commission on 13 23 26 or www.aec.gov.au.

To find out more about the policies of political parties to help you make an informed decision about who to vote for, check out the:

Australian Democrats: www.democrats.org.au

Australian Labour Party: www.alp.org.au

Family First: www.familyfirst.org.au

Greens: greens.org.au.

Liberal Party of Australia: www.liberal.org.au

National Party of Australia: www.nationals.org.au

The information in this booklet is accurate at the time of printing (October 2007), however the AEC is always the best source of electoral information.



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Office for Youth



How a Federal Election Works

THE SHORT STORY...

- Election Day is Saturday, 24 November 2007.
- Voting is compulsory for all Australian citizens 18 years and over.
- To vote you have to go to a 'polling booth' on Election Day. Polling booths are, usually open between 8am and 6pm and located in a local hall, or school.
- If you can't get to a polling booth, you can vote by mail or in person before Election Day, you should call the Australian Electoral Commission on 13 23 26 to arrange this.
- Your vote is for one Member of Parliament (MP) in the House of Representatives to represent you and others living in your electorate, and Senators who represent the state of South Australia.
- If you want a particular party to be elected to Government you should vote for a member of that party in the House of Representatives. The political party with the most members elected to the House of Representatives forms the Government.
- You can vote for people who belong to political parties, or for independents.
- If you want information on how to vote, how votes are counted, what the policies of the major parties are and more, then read on for THE FULL STORY...



THE FULL STORY...

Australia's Federal Parliament

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, or Federal Parliament, is made up of two Houses. There is the House of Representatives, sometimes called the Lower House; and the Senate, sometimes called the Upper House or House of Review. Both Houses are directly elected by the people of Australia. The politicians who are elected are known as local Members, Members of Parliament, or MPs. Politicians elected to the Senate are known as Senators.

The role of the House of Representatives is to run the country by developing policies so that the country can operate. The House of Representatives is able to make policy decisions about a range of issues that affect all Australians. The Federal Government also deals with other countries on behalf of all Australians.

The role of the Senate is to represent the States equally and to review the proposals and decisions of the House of Representatives and executive government. All States have equal representation because Australia's Constitution was written to ensure that less populated States have equal access to government decision-making processes.

Who can become a Member of Parliament?

To become a member of the House of Representatives you must be an Australian citizen and 18 years of age. People who stand for Parliament are known as candidates.

You cannot become a member of the House of Representatives if you are a Senator, Member of a State Parliament, a public servant, an officer of the Electoral Commission, not an Australian citizen, an undischarged bankrupt or a person convicted of certain offences.

To be a candidate you need to be nominated by six electors of the electorate the candidate is standing in, and pay a deposit of \$500 which is returned if the candidate gets a minimum of 4% of votes in the electorate.

A candidate receiving more than 50% of the first preference votes is immediately elected. If no candidate gains 50% of first preferences, the one with the fewest votes is excluded. That candidate's votes are then transferred to the other candidates according to the preferences shown. This process continues until one candidate has more than 50% of the votes and is declared the winner.

How do I vote if I want a particular political party to become the Government?

If you want a particular party to become the Government you should vote for a member of this party in the House of Representatives. The political party with the most members elected to the House of Representatives forms the Government

Who are the Political Parties in Australia?

There are three major parties in Australian politics; the oldest are the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the Liberal Party (LIB) and the National Party (Nat). The Liberal and National parties often join to form what is called the Coalition to oppose the ALP. The Australian Democrats (DEM), Greens (Greens), Family First (FF) and Independents (Ind) sometimes have influence and hold the balance of power in the Senate. This means that when the numbers of ALP and Coalition Senators is fairly even, then the smaller parties and independents are in control of passing legislation.

Minor parties often represent specific interests and their lobbying is a major part of the political process in Australia. Currently the Democrats, Greens and Family First are represented.

How is the Prime Minister elected?

The political party or coalition of parties which has won a majority of the seats in the House of Representatives forms the government. The leader of the Federal Government is called the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is selected by the political party to which they belong, from amongst their elected Members of Parliament. The Prime Minister is always a Member of the House of Representatives.





How is the Senate elected?

The Senate ballot paper has 2 sections which are clearly separated by a thick black line. You need to vote in one section only. If you choose to vote above the thick black line, you write the number 1 in the box above the party or group you want to vote for and your preferences will be counted according to the way the party or group has registered them with the Australian Electoral Commission.

If you choose to vote below the thick black line, you complete your ballot paper as you do for the House of Representatives, until you have numbered every box in the order of your preference.

How are votes counted?

Both the Senate and the House of representatives use the preferential voting system, but each system varies.

Senators are elected by a preferential voting system, known as proportional representation. This system is aimed at electing more than one candidate in each State who has obtained enough votes to exceed a required quota to get elected.

The quota is obtained by dividing the total number of formal votes by one more than the number of candidates to be elected and adding one to the result. For example, if the total of formal votes in a State is 700,000 and there are six Senate places, the quota is 100,001. To be elected you would need to win at least 100,001 votes.

Candidates who receive more than the quota (which is a proportion rather than a majority of the total vote) have their extra votes allocated to the voters' next preferred candidate. This happens until all of the votes have been allocated. The end result is the election of a number of candidates each representing a proportion or quota of the total vote.

For House of Representative candidates to be successful they must be supported by the majority of voters (50% of votes plus one vote). Preferential voting for the House of Representatives is designed to elect one candidate with a majority of votes.



ELECTIONS

When are elections held?

Federal elections are held approximately every 3 years. The Prime Minister can decide when to hold an election but has to get approval from the Governor General (the person who is the Queen's representative in Australia) before an election can be called.

What is an electoral division and how many are there?

The current House of Representatives has 150 seats or electoral divisions. Each electoral division is represented by one member. Under the Constitution, each original State is guaranteed at least five members, but all States except Tasmania now have more depending on their populations. The representation of States and Territories for this election is as follows:

New South Wales - 49 seats,
Victoria - 37 seats,
Queensland - 29 seats,
Western Australia - 15 seats,
South Australia - 11 seats,
Tasmania - 5 seats,
Australian Capital Territory - 2 seats,
and the Northern Territory - 2 seats.

The number of seats a State or Territory has is determined by a quota system explained on the AEC website (www.aec.gov.au). As Australia has uneven numbers of people living across it, the size of seats varies. In order to have balanced numbers in each seat the geographical size of the seats vary.

How many Senators are there?

There are 76 Senators in the Senate. Each of the six States has twelve Senators, and the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have two Senators each.





Who conducts elections?

The Australian Electoral Commission oversees all Commonwealth electoral matters including running elections, maintaining lists of voters (called electoral rolls), and distribution of electorates.

Who can vote in federal elections?

It is compulsory to enrol on the Commonwealth Electoral Roll once you turn 18 years. 17 year olds may enrol provisionally but may not vote until they turn 18 years. You also need to be an Australian citizen to be able to enrol. Once you have enrolled then you can vote.

Voting in Australia is compulsory once you are 18 years of age unless you have been exempt for reasons such as being of 'unsound mind', you are in prison serving a sentence of three years or more or have an unpardoned conviction for treason or treachery. For 24 hours after the writs for an election are posted you can still enrol to vote if you are eligible to do so. If you have enrolled, but have changed your address or name, you will also need to notify the Electoral Commission. Check with the AEC (www.aec.gov.au) for the timelines for doing this.

To enrol to vote or change your details you should complete an enrolment form. An enrolment form can be obtained from your local Post Office, the Australian Electoral Commission (telephone: 13 23 26) or you can download one from their webpage at www.aec.gov.au. Usually there are prepaid envelopes for you to post it to the Electoral Commission at your local post Office, so it won't cost you anything. Keep in mind that the form must reach the Electoral Commission by mail and cannot be sent electronically.

What if I can't get to a polling booth to vote on Election Day?

Don't waste your vote if you can't get to a polling booth on election day. Your vote is important. You can vote by mail or in person before polling day - and it is easy to arrange. Contact the Australian Electoral Commission by ringing 13 23 26 in Australia, or go to their website at: www.aec.gov.au. Keep in mind that applications must be received by mail on the Thursday before polling day, otherwise you won't be able to complete the voting materials sent to you and post them before the close of voting. Late applications will not be processed.



HOW DO I VOTE?

To vote you have to go to a polling booth on Election Day. Polling booths are usually located in schools, churches or community halls and are open between 8am and 6pm.

How-to-vote cards: Volunteers from political parties stand outside polling places distributing how-to-vote cards. These cards show voters how political parties or candidates would like them to vote. They may be taken into the polling booth to assist in filling in your ballot papers. You do not have to accept how to vote cards offered to you, and you don't have to follow the advice of any how to vote card.

When you enter the polling booth you have to go to a table and answer three questions: What is your name? Where do you live? Have you voted before in this election? You then have your name checked off the electoral roll. You will be given two pieces of paper called ballot papers - one ballot paper will be for the House of Representatives and the other ballot paper for the Senate. On this piece of paper are the names of all the candidates, and the parties they represent. The ballot paper for each seat lists the candidates' names and shows which parties they represent. Candidates who do not represent a party are listed as 'independents'.

Electing members to the House of Representatives

The voting system used to elect the House of Representatives is called preferential voting. This means voters rank all candidates in order of who they think will do the best job. You must number every square on the ballot paper, beginning with the number 1 in the box beside the candidate who is your first choice, number 2 beside your second choice, and so on.

If every box is not filled in with a number, your ballot paper will not be counted. Ballot papers that are filled out incorrectly are called informal votes. If you make a mistake on your ballot paper, you can ask the Electoral Commission Officer at the polling booth for another one.

