

Did you know?

You can't say that about me!

If Parliament is to be an effective part of the democratic system of government it is important that Members of Parliament are able to freely debate any issues without fear of prosecution. Members may say whatever they think fit during debate in the Parliament provided it is in accord with the ordinary rules and practice of the House. This is known as the privilege of freedom of speech. It is an important mechanism to ensure that maladministration, abuses of power and the like can be exposed in the public forum of Parliament.

In using this freedom of speech, Members bear a responsibility to take care with the things they may say about individuals and to avoid unjustly harming anyone by comments they may make in parliamentary debate. Despite all the care that Members may take, there are occasions when it may be judged important to speak frankly or, in the heat of impassioned debate, a Member may, rightly or wrongly, say something to which someone outside the House may take offence.

If you are aggrieved by something which a Member of Parliament has said about you, personally, in the House, you can apply to have a response recorded in the parliamentary record. A written application must be made to the Speaker of the House within three months of the making of the statement to which you wish to respond. Only individuals can use this procedure, it is not available to corporations, businesses, institutions or other organisations. Unless the matter is obviously trivial, frivolous, vexatious or offensive, the Speaker will refer it to the Committee of Privileges for investigation. The committee will recommend whether or not a response should be published but will not judge the truth of the statements made in the submission or in the House.

More information about the right of reply procedure and how to make an application can be obtained from *Factsheet no. 17 Protection of persons referred to in the House* (www.aph.gov.au/info/factsht) or from:

The Secretary
House of Representatives Committee of Privileges
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Telephone: (02) 6277 4399
Email: Committee.Reps@aph.gov.au

Question Time

Ever wondered why the House of Representatives Chamber is green in colour? Would you like to know when the House is sitting?

These are two of the frequently asked questions at the House of Representatives. In response, we are introducing to this bulletin a regular column called *Question Time*, to which you, our readers, can submit questions.

If you have anything you want to find out about the House of Representatives, email us at liaison.reps@aph.gov.au, fax us on (02) 6277 8521 or write to us at the Liaison and Projects Office, House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600. We will publish the best questions we get.

Question

Why is the House of Representatives Chamber green?

Answer

Green is the traditional colour used in the British House of Commons at Westminster. As our parliamentary system is based on the Westminster model, the House of Representatives has maintained the tradition of green furnishings and carpet in its Chamber and precincts.

When the provisional (now old) Parliament House was built in 1927, the green colour that was selected for the House of Representatives was the same as the green colour used in the

House of Commons. In the new Parliament House, Australia's national identity has been enhanced by the use of distinctive grey-greens in the House of Representatives. These shades of green are intended to evoke the colours of the Australian landscape.

Question

When are the sittings or meetings of the House of Representatives held?

Answer

The House meets (or sits) for around 20 weeks each year. Usually the meetings, known as sittings of the House, take place from February to March (the Autumn sittings), May to June (the Budget or Winter sittings) and August to December (the Spring sittings). Normally the House meets from Monday to Thursday during the weeks when sittings are held.

The sitting dates are available on the Internet at: www.aph.gov.au/house/work. You can obtain a pocket-size sitting calendar from:

Liaison and Projects Office
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Telephone: (02) 6277 2122
Fax: (02) 6277 8521
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