Today’s Parliament is the 43rd to be elected since Federation in 1901. It was officially opened on 28 September 2010 following the federal election held on 21 August 2010.

The Parliament is made up of 226 parliamentarians – 150 members in the House of Representatives and 76 senators in the Senate.

The government is formed by the party or coalition of parties with the support of the majority (more than half) of the 150 members elected to the House of Representatives. The current government is a minority government formed by the Australian Labor Party, supported by a member of the Australian Greens and several Independents.

According to section 28 of the Australian Constitution, elections for the House of Representatives must be held at least every three years. This means the latest possible date for the next federal election is Saturday, 30 November 2013. Half-Senate elections are usually held at the same time as House of Representatives elections.
TODAY THE SENATE LOOKS LIKE THIS

SENATE COMPOSITION

GOVERNMENT
Australian Labor Party
31 senators

OPPOSITION
Liberal Party of Australia,
The Nationals and the
Country Liberal Party
34 senators

MINOR PARTY
Australian Greens
9 senators

MINOR PARTY
Democratic Labor Party
1 senator

INDEPENDENT
1 senator
TODAY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES LOOKS LIKE THIS

HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

COMPOSITION

GOVERNMENT
Australian Labor Party
71 members

MINISTERS

PRIME MINISTER

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

SHADOW MINISTERS

OPPOSITION
Liberal Party of Australia,
The Nationals and the Country Liberal Party
71 members

INDEPENDENTS
5 members

MINOR PARTY

Australian Greens
1 member

MINOR PARTY

 Nationals WA
1 member

MINOR PARTY

Katter’s Australian Party
1 member

SERJEANT-AT-ARMS

SPEAKER

DEPUTY CLERK

CLERK

ADVISORS

ADVISORS

HANSARD
SITTING PERIOD 14-23 AUGUST

High Court green lights plain packaging for cigarettes
The High Court has found that new laws banning brand marks and logos on cigarette packets are allowed under the Australian Constitution. Tobacco companies challenged the Tobacco Plain Packaging Act 2011 in the High Court, arguing that under section 51 of the Constitution the Australian Government should compensate them for removing their copyright.

The High Court decision was widely reported in the international media, particularly in the UK and New Zealand where similar laws are being considered. It clears the way for the government to introduce plain packaging from December this year. Cigarette packets will be a drab brown colour, with large graphic health warnings and a discrete brand name. Australia is the first country to introduce laws of this kind.

Offshore processing laws passed
The Parliament has passed a bill that will allow asylum seekers to be detained in centres overseas while their claims for asylum are assessed. The Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing and Other Measures) Bill 2012 was passed by the House of Representatives on 15 August and by the Senate the following day.

The bill included recommendations made by the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers. The panel was asked by the Australian Government to report on the best way to prevent asylum seekers risking their lives on dangerous boat journeys to Australia. Among these recommendations was a return to offshore processing, including reopening centres in Nauru and on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea.

Under the bill asylum seekers who arrive by boat will not be resettled any faster than those who apply for asylum through regular channels. The bill was supported by the government and opposition.

Athlete Peter Norman acknowledged for stand on equality
Parliament has acknowledged runner Peter Norman who won silver in the 200 metres at the 1968 Mexico Games but who was later sidelined for taking part in a civil rights protest at the Games.

Two American athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who came first and third in the race, gave Black Power salutes after receiving their medals. Norman stood alongside them on the medal podium wearing an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge.

Many believe Norman was overlooked for the 1972 Olympic Games because of his actions in Mexico. Despite qualifying, he was not selected to compete. He quit athletics and died in 2006.

The Member for Fraser, Mr Andrew Leigh MP, has called on the Parliament to posthumously apologise to Norman. In a speech in the Federation Chamber, Mr Leigh said ‘Peter Norman was a champion because he won Olympic silver in 1968. Peter Norman was also a champion because he captured the hearts and minds of fair-minded people everywhere when, in 1968, his actions and support for two African-Americans sent a clear message to people around the world, especially in Australia, that basic human rights and equality for all are important’.

Several members of parliament spoke in support of Mr Leigh’s call. The Senate also passed a motion acknowledging Norman’s ‘brave action in the cause of racial equality’.
Young people have a say on workplace bullying

Youth groups have called on the Parliament to consider the needs of young workers when drawing up laws to tackle workplace bullying. The comments were made during a public hearing of the inquiry into workplace bullying, which was held in Adelaide. The inquiry is being conducted by the House of Representatives Employment Committee.

According to the youth groups who appeared as witnesses before the inquiry, young workers are particularly at risk of workplace bullying. To find out more about the inquiry, follow this link:


Airport Security Bill

A bill which will allow the use of body scanning equipment for security screening at airports was passed by the Senate on 15 August. The Aviation Transport Security Amendment (Screening) Bill 2012 passed the House of Representatives in May.

Under the bill, body scanning equipment can only be used as long as the images or personal information of people who are screened are not stored or transmitted. This provision was based on an amendment recommended by a Senate Committee.

Reserve Bank of Australia hearing

The governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA), Glen Stevens, appeared before the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics on 24 August. The committee is responsible for scrutinizing, or examining, the work of the RBA. The RBA governor appears before the committee twice a year and reports on Australia’s economic situation and outlook.

Opposition leader suspended from chamber

The Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, was suspended from the House of Representatives for using unparliamentary language. He was ejected under Standing Order 94(a) which allows the Speaker to suspend a member from the chamber for one hour without needing a vote of the House.

Mr Abbott is the fourth Leader of the Opposition in the history of the Australian Parliament to be sent from the chamber. The Hon John Howard MP was the last Leader of the Opposition to be suspended, 26 years ago. The others are the Hon Robert Menzies MP in 1949 and the Hon Joseph Cook MP in 1914.

Three other Leaders of the Opposition – the Hon Kim Beazley MP, the Hon Bert Evatt MP and the Hon Andrew Peacock MP – have also been suspended, but the suspensions did not proceed after they either apologised or the Speaker reversed his decision.

Since federation in 1901 no Prime Minister has been suspended from the chamber.

Northern Territory election

The Country Liberal Party (CLP) led by Mr Terry Mills will form the next Northern Territory government. The CLP’s victory in the territory election saw a six per cent swing against the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and ends 11 years of Labor rule in the territory. It means that the ALP remains in power federally and in South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT at the state/territory level. The ACT goes to the polls on 20 October.
26 JULY 2012

Former Speaker announces resignation

The former Speaker of the House of the Representatives, Mr Harry Jenkins MP, will retire from Parliament at the next election. Announcing his resignation, Mr Jenkins said ‘After over 26 years as the local member, it is time for me to explore other aspects of life’.

One of the longest-serving members in the current Parliament, Mr Jenkins was elected to the Victorian seat of Scullin in a by-election in 1986. He succeeded his father, Harry Jenkins senior, who had held the seat since it was created in 1969, and who also served as Speaker. Mr Jenkins was Speaker of the House from 2008 to 2011.

COAG meets

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 33rd meeting in Canberra on 25 July. It was attended by the Prime Minister, state Premiers, territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. Top of the agenda was the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which will increase support to disabled people and their carers.

During the meeting, the federal government reached agreement with the South Australian, Tasmanian and Australian Capital Territory governments to trial the scheme from July next year. The Victorian and New South Wales governments have since agreed to take part in the scheme. The NDIS will be jointly funded by the federal and state/territory governments.

COAG was established to foster cooperation between federal and state/territory governments.

For details about the outcomes of the meeting, follow this link to the COAG website: www.coag.gov.au

Royal Succession

COAG confirmed Australia’s support for changes to the rules for royal succession to the British throne, which will allow the crown to pass to first-born females. The changes also remove the ban on a monarch marrying a Roman Catholic.

The changes will reform British succession laws, which date back more than 300 years. While it is up to the British Parliament to amend these laws, the reforms have to be agreed to by countries or jurisdictions (such as the Australian states) whose head of state is the Queen.

Sixteen Commonwealth nations including Australia agreed to the changes at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Perth last year.

Asylum seeker bill defeated

A private member’s bill which would have allowed offshore processing of asylum seekers was defeated in the Senate on 28 June. The Migration Legislation Amendment (The Bali Process) Bill 2012 passed the House of Representatives the previous day.

The bill was introduced in February by Independent Mr Rob Oakeshott MP after the High Court ruled that the government’s Malaysian plan was unlawful. Under the Malaysian plan the government would send 800 asylum seekers to Malaysia in exchange for 4000 declared refugees. It was hoped this would deter asylum seekers from making the dangerous boat journey to Australia.

Under Mr Oakeshott’s bill the government could send asylum seekers to any one of forty countries, including Malaysia, who agreed to the Bali process — a regional agreement for dealing with asylum seekers.

The government brought forward debate and a vote on the bill after two boats
sank en route to Australia with the loss of about 90 lives. Question Time was suspended in the House and the following day in the Senate to allow the often emotional debate to continue.

The House passed the bill after agreeing to an amendment proposed by Independent Mr Andrew Wilkie MP to review the bill after 12 months. However, the Opposition and Greens combined to defeat the bill in the Senate.

The Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, then announced that a three-person panel led by former Defence Force chief Angus Houston has been formed to recommend policy options to the Parliament.

To find out more about the bill, follow this link:

www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4747

Senate committee supports conscience vote on gay marriage

A Senate committee has recommended that all political parties allow their members a free, or conscience, vote in the Parliament on the issue of marriage equality. This was one of the main recommendations made by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in a report on the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010.

The bill was introduced into the Senate by Senator Sarah Hanson-Young in September 2010. It is one of three private member’s bills currently before the Parliament which seek to amend, or change, the Marriage Act 1961 to legalise same-sex marriage. The other two bills were introduced in the House of Representatives in February.

In a speech to the Senate, Senator Hanson-Young said the bill would ‘provide equality for same-sex couples [by removing] discrimination under the Marriage Act so that while marriage is still a union between two consenting adults, it is not defined by gender’.

The committee called on the Senate to pass laws to allow same-sex marriage. However, some opposition members of the committee released a dissenting report opposing a conscience vote and any change to the Marriage Act.

Earlier, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs tabled a report into the two private member’s bills before the House. It recommended changing the Marriage Act ‘to ensure equal access to marriage for all couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life’.

However, the committee said that while its report ‘aims to inform the parliament in its debate’, it is up to the Parliament to decide whether to pass the bill. The committee received a record 276 000 responses during its inquiry. Nearly two-thirds were in support of same-sex marriage.

To read the committee reports follow these links:


High Court ruling

The High Court has ruled that the government does not have the power under the Australian Constitution to fund the school chaplaincy program. It made this finding in Williams v the Commonwealth.

The case was brought by Ron Williams, who challenged a funding agreement between the government and the Scripture Union of Queensland. The group provides chaplaincy services at the Queensland state primary school attended by Williams’ children.

The Commonwealth argued that the government could fund the program under section 61 of the Constitution which gives it executive power to carry out the laws of the Commonwealth. However, the High Court found that ‘the Commonwealth’s executive power does not include a power to do what the Commonwealth Parliament could authorise the Executive to do, such as entering into agreements or contracts, whether or not the Parliament had actually enacted the legislation [laws].’

In response to the finding, the Parliament passed the Financial Framework
Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 3) 2012 which gives the government the authority to fund programs of this kind.

To find out more about this case, follow these links: www.hcourt.gov.au/theconversation.edu.au/the-high-court-school-chaplains-case-and-what-it-means-for-commonwealth-funding-7795

To find out more about the bill, check this link: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4864

Senate vacancies
Liberal Senator Mary Jo Fisher announced that she will resign from the Senate on 10 August. Senator Fisher was appointed to the Senate in 2007 to fill a vacancy created by the resignation of Senator Amanda Vanstone. She was then elected to the Senate in 2010.

Under Section 15 of the Constitution, the South Australian Parliament will appoint a replacement for Senator Fisher who is a member of the Liberal Party.

Lin Thorp and Peter Whish-Wilson were sworn in as senators on 21 June to fill the casual vacancies created by the resignations of Tasmanian senators Nick Sherry and Bob Brown. They were sworn in after the President of the Senate, Senator the Hon John Hogg, informed the chamber he had been notified by the Governor of Tasmania that the Tasmanian Parliament had chosen them to fill the vacancies.

Parliament passes new laws to revive shipping industry
The Parliament has passed a series of bills aimed at revitalizing Australia’s shipping industry. The five bills, which make up the government’s ‘Stronger Shipping for a Stronger Economy’ legislative package, will encourage investment in Australian shipping and make it internationally competitive.

In introducing the bills to the House, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Mr Anthony Albanese MP, described the package as ‘the most far-reaching overhaul of the Australian shipping industry since 1912’. He pointed out that in the past ten years the Australian shipping fleet has shrunk from 55 to 21, and concluded ‘we need to act now or we will not have an industry left at all’.

The bills were passed by the House of Representatives on 31 May and by the Senate on 18 June. They received Royal Assent from the Governor-General on 21 June and took effect on 1 July.

Prime Minister at international summits
During the first sitting week in June, the Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, attended the Group 20 Leaders Summit (G20) in Los Cabos, Mexico and the RIO + 20 Conference in Brazil.

During Ms Gillard’s absence from Parliament, Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Wayne Swan MP, was acting Prime Minister.

New Marine Parks
The government has announced plans to create 44 new marine reserves, or parks, in coastal waters around Australia. The new reserves will cover a third of Australian waters, giving Australia the largest network of marine parks in the world.

The government can proclaim the reserves under The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. As part of this process, the proposed marine reserves will be open to a final round of public comment. It is expected that the final marine reserves will be declared before the end of this year.

For archived news please visit www.peo.gov.au/students/now_parl_latestNews.html and click on one of the archive years.
AUSTRALIA’S HEAD OF STATE

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is Australia’s head of state. On the advice of the Australian Prime Minister, the Queen appoints the Governor-General to act on her behalf.

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC was sworn in as Australia’s 25th Governor-General on 5 September 2008. The Governor-General acts as the Queen’s representative.

CHAMBER LEADERSHIP

The Speaker of the House of Representatives is the Hon Peter Slipper MP.

The President of the Senate is Senator the Hon John Hogg.

GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION LEADERSHIP – HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Prime Minister of Australia is the Hon Julia Gillard MP. Ms Gillard is also the Leader of the Australian Labor Party.

The Leader of the Opposition is the Hon Tony Abbott MP. Mr Abbott is also the Leader of the Liberal Party of Australia.

The Deputy Prime Minister is the Hon Wayne Swan MP.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is the Hon Julie Bishop MP.

The Leader of the House and Manager of Government Business in the House is the Hon Anthony Albanese MP.

The Manager of Opposition Business in the House is the Hon Christopher Pyne MP.
INDEPENDENTS AND MINOR PARTIES – HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr Adam Bandt MP is a member of the Australian Greens.

Mr Bob Katter MP is a member of Katter’s Australian Party.

Mr Robert Oakeshott MP is an Independent.

The Hon Peter Slipper MP is an Independent.

Mr Tony Crook MP is a member of the Nationals WA.

Mr Craig Thomson is an Independent.

Mr Andrew Wilkie MP is an Independent.

Mr Tony Windsor MP is an Independent.

GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION LEADERSHIP – SENATE

The Leader of the Government in the Senate is Senator the Hon Christopher Evans.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate is Senator the Hon Eric Abetz.

The Manager of Government Business in the Senate is Senator Jacinta Collins.

The Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate is Senator Mitch Fifield.
LEADERSHIP – OTHER PARTIES

- **The Leader of The Nationals** is the Hon Warren Truss MP.
- **The Leader of the Australian Greens** is Senator Christine Milne.
- **The Leader of The Nationals in the Senate** is Senator Barnaby Joyce.
- **The Leader of The Democratic Labor Party** is Senator John Madigan.

PARLIAMENTARY OFFICERS

Parliamentary officers are employees of parliamentary departments that advise and support the Senate and House of Representatives.

- **The Clerk of the House of Representatives** is Mr Bernard Wright.
- **The Serjeant-at-Arms** is Ms Robyn McClelland.
- **The Clerk of the Senate** is Dr Rosemary Laing.
- **The Usher of the Black Rod** is Mr Brien Hallett.

Find out more details about who’s who in Parliament:
**WHAT’S ON**

**SENATE ESTIMATES**

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**BILLS**

A bill is a proposal for a new law or a change to an old one. To find out what bills the Parliament is working on right now go to Parliament of Australia Bills [www.aph.gov.au/bills](http://www.aph.gov.au/bills)

**BROADCASTS**


**COMMITTEES**

The Parliament establishes committees to examine bills or investigate issues in detail. Members of the public can make submissions to committees to express their views and opinions. To find out more about current committee inquiries go to Parliament of Australia Committees [www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees)

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**2012 PARLIAMENTARY CALENDAR**

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**WHAT’S ON**

**COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS**

The Council of Australian Governments is made up of the Prime Minister, state premiers, territory chief ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. Visit the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) for more information [www.coag.gov.au](http://www.coag.gov.au)

**ESTIMATES**

Senate estimates hearings are held three times a year. It is a chance for the Parliament to scrutinise how the government has spent the Budget and to question government ministers and senior public servants. Read more about Senate estimates [www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates)
EVENTS
Parliament House is a busy and vibrant place, hosting a variety of visitors and events every year. Go to This Week in Parliament to find out more
Parliament House hosts events including the annual Australia Day Live concert, at which the Prime Minister announces the Australians of the Year. For more details go to Australia Day Live
www.australiadaylive.gov.au

QUESTION TIME
Question Time is at 2.00pm every day when Parliament is sitting and lasts for about an hour. During Question Time in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, members and senators can ask questions to ministers about their actions and decisions. Watch a recent video of Question Time in the House of Representatives
and Question Time in the Senate

THE BUDGET
The Treasurer presents the annual Budget every May. It outlines the government’s plan for collecting and spending money. Get informed about this year’s Australian Government Budget
www.budget.gov.au
STATISTICS

Out of 226 parliamentarians*

- 225 Non-indigenous
- 1 30 or Under
- 1 Indigenous
- 44 60 or Over
- 226 PARLIAMENTARIANS
- 66 Female
- 28 Born Overseas
- 198 Born in Australia
- 160 Male

*As at 23 August 2012

Since the start of the 43rd Parliament*

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*As at 23 August 2012

Bills since the start of the 43rd Parliament*

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<td>First introduced</td>
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<td>Not passed (negatived) or proceeded with **</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passed by both houses</td>
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<td>374</td>
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*As at 23 August 2012

**Includes bills that were negatived, reintroduced then either passed or negatived for a second time.
Committee reports presented to the 43rd Parliament*

| House of Representatives** | 272 |
| Senate** | 345 |

*As at 23 August 2012  
**Includes Joint Committees administered by this house of Parliament

### Composition of the House of Representatives*

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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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*As at 31 May 2012  
**Formed with the support of several Independents and a member of the Australian Greens

### Composition of the Senate*

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<td>Democratic Labor Party (DLP)</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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*As at 31 May 2012
## Composition of the House of Representatives expanded*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>ALP</th>
<th>Lib</th>
<th>The NATS</th>
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*As at 31 May 2012  
**Katter’s Australian Party

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## Composition of the Senate expanded*

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<th>ALP</th>
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<th>The NATS</th>
<th>CLP</th>
<th>AG</th>
<th>DLP</th>
<th>IND</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As at 31 May 2012

You can find more detailed statistics about the House of Representatives here:  

You can find more detailed statistics about the Senate here:  
GET INVOLVED

Laws made by the federal Parliament affect your life. Decisions made by the government can be influenced by debate in the Parliament. Have your say in the process through:

**COMMITTEES**

You can help a committee to investigate a bill or issue by writing a submission or attending a public hearing. Find out more about how to contribute at:


**PETITIONS**

A petition is a document presented to Parliament by a group of people asking the Parliament to take action on a particular issue. By starting or signing a petition, you can influence decisions made by Parliament. Find out more about submitting a petition to Parliament at:


Senate: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Petitions/Senate_Petitions

**CONTACTING YOUR MEMBER OR SENATOR**

Write or contact your member or a senator from your state/territory or local electorate. Find them at:


Many parliamentarians also use social networking like Twitter and Facebook to stay in contact with the public.

**VOTING**

Australian citizens aged 18 years or over are required to vote at federal elections. When you vote, you are expressing your views by choosing which people you want to represent you in Parliament. For more information about voting go the Australian Electoral Commission www.aec.gov.au
OTHER LINKS

Parliament an Overview

Handbook of the 43rd Parliament

What's new in the Parliament
www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events

About the House

House of Representatives Members
www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members

Senators

Parliament at Work

House of Representatives

Senate

Publications

Australian Electoral Commission,
Elections—frequently asked questions

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Quick Answers

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A collection of parliamentary definitions.
www.peo.gov.au/students/gloss.html

Fact Sheet Series
A comprehensive set of fact sheets on the federal Parliament.

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Watch an online video series about how Parliament works.