

## AUSTRALIA

**Date of Elections:** December 13, 1975

### **Purpose of Elections**

Elections were held for all the members of Parliament following the premature dissolution of this body on November 11, 1975. Previous general elections had taken place on May 18, 1974.

### **Characteristics of Parliament**

The Australian Federal Parliament is bicameral, consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The House of Representatives, according to the Constitution, must be, as nearly as practicable, twice the size of the Senate. The number of Representatives in each of the country's six States is in proportion to the population, but must be at least five. At present, the membership of the House is 127 members, which includes members for the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. All Representatives are elected for 3 years.

The Senate comprises 64 members elected for 6 years and renewed by halves every 3 years. Of this total 10 Senators represent each of Australia's six States, while residents of the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory are for the first time each represented by two Senators\*.

### **Electoral System**

All British subjects who have been resident in Australia for six consecutive months, are aged 18 and over, and appear on the continuously revised electoral registers are entitled to vote for members of Parliament. Persons of unsound mind, attainted of treason, under sentence for any offence punishable by imprisonment for one year or more, or persons who are holders of temporary entry permits under the Migration Act 1958-1966, or are prohibited immigrants under that Act, are barred from registering as electors.

Voting is a duty and unwarranted abstention is punishable by fine.

All persons fulfilling the conditions required for electors who have resided in Australia for at least three years can be elected to the House of Representatives or Senate. Undischarged bankrupts, persons under allegiance to a

\* See section *Parliamentary Developments*, p. 20.

foreign State, holders of an office of profit or pension payable by the State, as well as certain persons having a pecuniary interest through an agreement with the Government cannot be members of Parliament.

Candidates to Parliament must be nominated by six qualified electors and make a payment of AJ200 (Senate) or A\$100 (House). This monetary deposit is reimbursed if the candidate polls at least 10% (Senate) or 20% (House) of the average or total number, respectively, of first preference votes polled by the successful candidates in the election.

Members of the House of Representatives are elected according to a system of preferential, or alternative, vote. Under this system, Representatives — one for each electoral division — are elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast. Voters are required to indicate, on their ballot paper, an order of preference among all the candidates contesting the same seat. If none of the candidates in a division obtains an absolute majority of the first preference votes, a second count is held. At this point, the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated and the votes which he had obtained in the first count are redistributed among his opponents on the basis of the second choice indicated by the electors. This procedure is repeated until such time as one of the candidates obtains an absolute majority.

Senators are elected according to the single-transferable-vote form of proportional representation. Under this system, each elector indicates his order of preference among all the candidates in his constituency. Once the number of first preference votes obtained by each candidate has been recorded, an electoral quota is determined by dividing the total number of first preference votes by the number of seats to be filled and increasing by one the result so arrived at. Any candidate who has received a number of votes equal to or greater than the established quota is declared elected. Should there remain any seats to be filled, a second distribution is carried out on the same basis, using the second preference votes, after the surplus votes (that is, the number in excess of the quota) of the elected candidates have been transferred to the continuing candidates.

A by-election is held to fill any seat which becomes vacant in the House of Representatives between general elections. Vacancies in the Senate are filled either by choice of the Houses of Parliament of the particular State or through appointment by that State's Governor.

### General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On November 11, 1975, the Governor-General dissolved Parliament and dismissed Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. These steps came after five weeks of political deadlock caused by the decision of the conservative

Liberal-National Country Party opposition to use its majority position in the Senate to block passage of the Government's bills of supply (the appropriation of funds to meet government expenditure) until Mr. Whitlam agreed to call general elections.

During the lively three-week election campaign, Opposition leader Malcolm Fraser, of the Liberal Party, who had been appointed to head a caretaker Government until the elections, spoke of the country's ailing economy, marked by inflation and unemployment. Mr. Whitlam defended his Party's social and welfare programmes and pointed to the difficult economic circumstances under which his Government had assumed power. In accordance with broadcasting regulations, all television and radio coverage of the campaign ended two days before polling day.

In a landslide victory, Mr. Fraser obtained one of the largest parliamentary majorities in the country's history, as the Liberal - National Country coalition won 91 of 127 seats in the House of Representatives and 35 of 64 Senate seats. Prime Minister Fraser announced the membership of his new Government on December 18.

## Statistics

### 1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives

Number of registered voters. . . . .	8,262,333
Voters. . . . .	7,881,873 (95.4%)
Blank or void ballot papers. . . . .	149,294
Valid votes. . . . .	7,732,579

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats	Number of Seats held at Dis- solution	Number of Seats won at Previous Elections
Labor Party. . . . .	127	3,313,004	42.8	36	66	(ill)
Liberal Party. . . . .	107	3,232,160	41.8	(iS)	41	10
National Country Party	44	869,919	11.3	23	21	21
Democratic Labor Party	36	101,750	1.3	—	—	—
Australia Party . . . .	32	33,630	0.4	—	—	—
Others. . . . .	136	182,116	2.4	—	—	—
				127	127	127

*2. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats  
in the Senate*

Number of registered voters. . . . .	8,262,333	
Voters. . . . .	7,881,873	(95.4%)
Blank or void ballot papers. . . . .	717,160	
Valid votes. . . . .	7,164,713	

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	a %	Number of Seats	Number of Seats held at Dis- solution	Number of Seats won at Previous Elections
Liberal Party- National Country Party. . . . .	50	3,706,989	51.7	35	30	29
Labor Party. . . . .	40	2,931,310	40.9	27	27	29
Democratic Labor Party	25	191,049	2.7	—	—	—
Liberal Movement. . . . .	18	76,426	1.1	1	1	1
Australia Party . . . . .	13	34,632	0.5	—	—	—
Others. . . . .	125	224,307	3.1	1	2	1
				64*	60	60

\* Four Seats added since last elections.

*3. Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Sex*

	Senate	House of Representatives
Men	58	127
Women	6	—
	64	127

*4. Average Age of Members of Parliament*

Senate. . . . .	50 years
House of Representatives. . . . .	47 years