

AUSTRALIA

Date of Elections: 5 March 1983

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the seats in Parliament following premature dissolution of this body on 4 February 1983. Previous general elections had been held on 18 October 1980.

Characteristics of Parliament

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia is bicameral, consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

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

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 125 members, which includes two members from the Australian Capital Territory and one from the Northern Territory. All Representatives are elected for 3 years.

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 in parliamentary elections. 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, or are prohibited immigrants under that Act, are barred from registering as electors.

Voting is compulsory and unwarranted abstention is punishable by a fine of up to A\$10.

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 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 AS200 (Senate) or AS100 (House). This monetary deposit is reimbursed if the candidate polls more than 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 in single-member constituencies according to a system of preferential, or alternative, vote. Under this system, members of the House - 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 the remaining candidates 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 as the House of Representatives, using the second preference votes, after the surplus votes (i.e., 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 by choice of the Houses of Parliament of the particular State or, if the Parliament is not in session, through appointment by that State's Governor, and the person so chosen, if replacing a person publicly recognized as an endorsed member of a political party, must be from the same political party. A joint sitting of both Houses of the Commonwealth Parliament is required to choose a Senator if the place of a Senator representing the Australian Capital Territory becomes vacant; if the Parliament is not sitting, the Governor-General may appoint a person to fill the vacancy for a period up to 14 days from the meeting of the Parliament. In the Northern Territory, the vacancy is filled by the Legislative Assembly or, if the Assembly is not sitting, by the Administrator, with the same 14-day limitation. In each of the Territories, the person chosen must be of the same political party as the person replaced, if the person to be replaced was publicly recognized as an endorsed member of a political party.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (Liberal Party) announced on 3 February that he would seek the dissolution of both Houses of Parliament and call elections for 5 March. According to Mr. Fraser, this was due to the fact that the two Houses were unable to agree on a number of economic bills; he added that the election was "imperative" because of opposition of trade unions and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) to the federal Government's national wage freeze and other policies designed to improve the economy.

On 8 February, Mr. Robert (Bob) Hawke was formally elected leader of the ALP, succeeding Mr. William Hayden. The former president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Mr. Hawke said that if returned to power, his party would launch an economic

recovery programme aimed at creating 500,000 new jobs and a 5% growth rate by 1986; he also accused the governing Liberal/National Party coalition of following tight money policies that had depressed the Australian economy. Mr. Fraser countered by charging that the Labor plan would damage the country's balance-of-payments situation. Apart from these issues, the campaign focused to a large extent on the personalities of the two leaders.

On polling day, the ALP swept to victory by picking up 23 additional Representatives' seats, thus obtaining an absolute majority in this House for the first time since the 1974 general elections. Although the ALP also increased its number in the Senate to 30, the Australian Democratic Party, retaining its five seats, continued to hold the balance of power in this 64-seat Chamber. Mr. Hawke became Prime Minister and his Labor Cabinet was sworn in on 11 March.

Statistics

1. *Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives*

Political Group	% of Votes obtained	Number of Seats	of Seats held at Dissolution
Australian Labor Party . . .	49.5	75	52
Liberal Party.	34.4	33	53
National Country Party . . .	9.2	17	20
Australian Democratic Party	5.0	—	—
Others.	19	—	—
		125	125

2. *Distribution of Seats in the Senate*

Political Group	Number of Seats	Number of Seats held at Dissolution
Australian Labor Party . . .	30	27
Liberal Party.	24	25
Australian Democrats Party	5	5
National Country Party. . .	4	3
Independents	1	1
	64	64