

One way parliamentary committees investigate an issue is to invite people to give evidence at a public hearing. This gives you an opportunity to present your views and helps committee members to become better informed by examining all relevant aspects of an inquiry.

The role of hearings

Committee hearings allow members of Parliament to:

- speak directly to people about an issue and ask questions about what they said in a submission
- find out how you, your organisation, or your community feel about an issue
- refer to and use the information and arguments presented to the inquiry.

Inviting witnesses

A committee can invite members of the public, representatives of organisations, public servants, academics and government ministers to appear at a hearing. A witness may have presented a written submission to an inquiry, but this is not essential. You can ask to appear as a witness but a committee may not agree to your request.

Hearings in public or private

Committee hearings are usually held in public. Sometimes they are held in private (*in camera*) and in such cases the public and the media must leave the hearing room. As a witness you can ask, either before or during a hearing, that all or part of your evidence be heard in private. The committee will usually agree to your request.

Your guide to appearing at a hearing

Here is a step-by-step guide to what you can expect to happen before, during and after a hearing. Please keep in mind that there may be some variations used by different committees.

1 Making arrangements

You will be invited by a committee staff member to appear at a hearing. They will discuss the date, time and place for your appearance. These details will be confirmed in writing before the hearing day. If you need equipment during your presentation, such as an overhead projector or whiteboard, please tell committee staff at least two working days before the hearing. Also advise committee staff if you would like additional people to attend with you and give evidence.

2 Reviewing your submission

If you have made a submission to the inquiry make sure you read it again before your appearance.

3 At the hearing

The committee members will be sitting at a table, with witnesses facing the committee chair. Members of the public and the media will be in a separate area. During the hearing only committee members and witnesses may speak. When you arrive at the hearing room make yourself known to committee staff. They will tell you where to sit and when to approach the committee table.

4 Answering some basic questions

Before you start your evidence, you will be asked to take either the oath (swearing on the Bible) or the affirmation (a non-religious statement) to tell the truth. If you want a holy book other than the Bible please tell committee staff before the hearing.

The committee chair will ask you some introductory questions such as:

- your full name and occupation
- the capacity in which you appear, for example, as a private citizen, a public servant, or a representative of an organisation
- whether you are familiar with the terms of reference of the inquiry.

5 Giving evidence

After you have answered these questions the chair will ask if you want to make an opening statement. If you do, it should be short and relevant to the terms of reference. The chair and other members of the

committee will then ask you questions. Please tell the chair if a question is outside your knowledge. If you cannot answer a question or need more information, you can ask to provide a written response at a later date. While it is important that you are well-prepared, you should avoid reading word-for-word from a prepared script. Hearings are meant to be interactive.

6 Providing additional documents

During the hearing, you can submit additional documents including charts, videotapes or statistical data as evidence. If you plan to bring additional documents, please bring eight extra copies for use by committee members and staff. If you cannot bring extra copies, please tell committee staff two days before the hearing.

7 Recording and checking evidence

The evidence you give at the hearing will be recorded and a transcript will be sent to you several days later. You can correct transcription errors, but the content and style cannot be changed.

The corrected transcript should be returned to the committee office by the required date.

The transcript will only be made public if the committee decides to publish it. If all or part of your evidence is heard in private, this will be stated on the transcript and the committee will consider whether to make it public. Transcripts that have been made public are available on our website (see back panel for details). Any evidence you give in private may not be disclosed without the committee's permission.

8 The committee's report

A copy of the committee's report is made available to everyone who appeared as a witness or made a submission to an inquiry. Reports can also be found on the committee's website (see back panel).

9 The Government response

Within six months after a report is tabled, the Government must provide a response to the Legislative Council that addresses the committee's recommendations. A copy of the Government response is sent to everyone who appeared as a witness or made a submission to an inquiry. The response can also be found on the committee's website (see back panel).

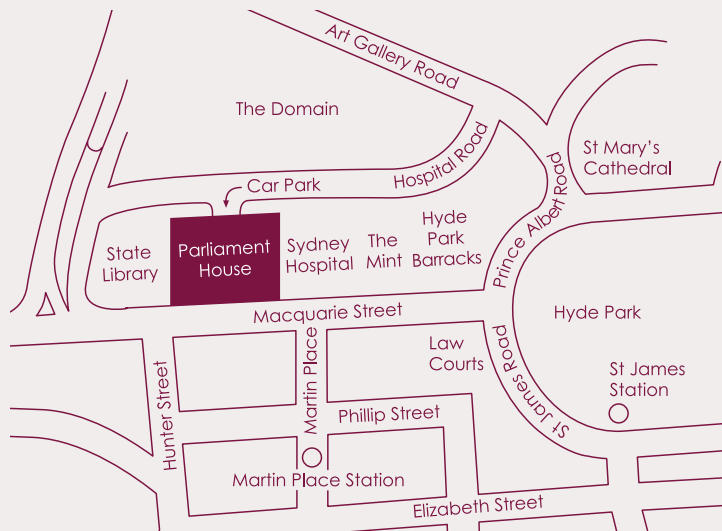
Information on the web



You can find submissions, hearing schedules, transcripts, committee reports and other information about standing committees of the current Parliament on our website at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees. From here you can navigate to specific committees and inquiries. If you need help using the website please contact the relevant committee secretariat.

This brochure is one of a series on standing committees. **Making a submission** and **Standing committees** are also available from the committee office and on our website.

Getting to Parliament House in Sydney



Parliamentary privilege – what you should know

Parliamentary committees are an extension of the Parliament. A committee's proceedings, including the presentation of submissions and the giving of evidence, are protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that submissions and oral evidence given before a committee can be made freely and honestly without fear or threat of legal action for defamation. At the same time, committee hearings and submissions are not an opportunity to make adverse comments about individuals. Comments made outside a hearing do not receive the protection of parliamentary privilege.

Submissions and evidence given before a committee become committee documents and are confidential until the committee decides to make them public. Parliamentary privilege extends to submissions and transcripts of evidence that are published by a committee. Anyone who republishes a committee document apart from the Parliament or its committees is subject to the laws of defamation.

Witnesses are also protected by parliamentary privilege from intimidation or other attempts to influence or deter them from giving evidence, or from being penalised as a result of their evidence.

Contacting the committees

Address mail to the relevant committee at:

Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

General Purpose Standing Committees

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees
Telephone: (02) 9230 3544 Fax: (02) 9230 3416
Email: gpscsecretariat@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Law and Justice Committee

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lawandjustice
Telephone: (02) 9230 3311 Fax: (02) 9230 3371
Email: lawandjustice@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Social Issues Committee

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/socialissues
Telephone: (02) 9230 3078 Fax: (02) 9230 2981
Email: socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au

State Development Committee

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/statedevelopment
Telephone: (02) 9230 2641 Fax: (02) 9230 2981
Email: statedevelopment@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Privileges Committee

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees
Telephone: (02) 9230 2346 Fax: (02) 9230 2761
Email: privilege@parliament.nsw.gov.au



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Committee hearings

Giving evidence in person

