

Upper House Committees



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The Parliament of New South Wales has two houses: the Legislative Council (Upper House) and the Legislative Assembly (Lower House). Both Houses have parliamentary committees.

Upper House committees usually comprise up to eight members of Parliament from different political parties including the government, the opposition and crossbench parties.

The role of committees

Committees have a number of roles, including to:

- provide an important opportunity for individuals and groups to engage in the parliamentary process and put their views directly to members of Parliament. Making a written submission or being a witness at a committee hearing are common ways individuals and organisations participate in an inquiry process.
- examine and scrutinise government policy, expenditure, decisions and legislation in order to hold the government to account. Committees can ask ministers and senior public servants to explain and justify their actions or decisions.
- promote public debate and increase awareness of issues being considered by Parliament. Committee reports provide a valuable summary of a range of views on a particular issue.

Types of committees

There are several types of Upper House committees, including:

- three **subject committees** – the Standing Committees on Law and Justice, Social Issues and State Development
- eight **portfolio committees** – each focusing on particular areas of government accountability, for example, health, education or transport
- a range of **specialist committees** – such as the Regulation Committee, Selection of Bills Committee, Privileges Committee, Procedure Committee and Public Accountability and Works Committee.

At times, select committees can also be established by the Upper House to inquire into particular issues. Select committees cease to exist once an inquiry has been completed.

There are also **joint select statutory committees** comprised of members from both the Upper and Lower House.

Steps in a committee inquiry

When a committee conducts an inquiry into a particular issue, it usually takes the following steps:

1. Setting the terms of reference

The terms of reference outline the scope of the inquiry. They may be referred by a minister or by a vote of the Upper House, or self-referred by a committee.

2. Evidence gathering

Committees start inquiries by calling for submissions from the public and relevant organisations. They may also hold public hearings, forums and site visits. These can take place in Sydney at Parliament House or in regional locations.

3. Reporting to Parliament

After consideration of the evidence, committees prepare an inquiry report which can include findings and recommendations to government. The report is tabled in the Upper House and members are given an opportunity to debate it.

4. Government response to recommendations

The government is required to respond to a committee's recommendations within three months after a committee report is tabled. The government is not required to implement the recommendations but must explain what action, if any, it will take in relation to each recommendation.

How can I get further information?

If you have questions or would like further assistance, please call us or the relevant inquiry secretariat. Contact details are listed on each inquiry webpage.



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www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/parliamentary-business/committees/inquiries



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