The Parliament of New South Wales, the law-making body for the State of New South Wales, is Australia’s first and oldest parliament. It consists of two democratically elected Houses.

The **Lower House** of the Parliament of New South Wales, the Legislative Assembly, is the seat of Government which is formed by the party supported by the majority of the House’s 93 Members.

Elections take place every four years using an optional preferential voting system. Members each represent a single electorate.

The Premier and most Ministers are Members of the Legislative Assembly so most bills and government business are introduced here.

The colours of the Chambers follow the British tradition of green for the Lower House and red for the Upper House.

**THE LOWER HOUSE**

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**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

The Legislative Assembly Chamber is Australia’s oldest legislative chamber. Originally built for Legislative Council in 1843, it has been used continuously by the Legislative Assembly since it was created in 1856 when the bicameral two-house Parliamentary system was instituted. In the early 1980s the Chamber was restored to its 1856 appearance.

In 1829 the enlarged Legislative Council began to meet in the Chief Surgeon’s Quarters and from that time this site has remained the centre of the New South Wales Legislature.

In 1843 and again in 1856 legislative chambers were added to meet the needs of the increasingly democratic colony. So, at other times, were facilities such as offices, dining rooms and a library. Plans for a completely new building were always abandoned because of cost.

Finally in 1974, rebuilding began. A jumble of buildings was replaced with a 12-storey block linked by the Fountain Court to the preserved Macquarie Street buildings. The historic Chambers, Library, Foyers and former Surgeon’s Quarters were meticulously restored, and remain today as the heart and public face of New South Wales’ Parliament House.

**THE FOUNTAIN COURT**

Today, only the two outer buildings of the 1816 “Rum Hospital” remain on Macquarie Street. The northern wing, shown above – once the Chief Surgeon’s Quarters – became the nucleus of Parliament House in 1908.

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**TO A CONTEMPORARY CORNERSTONE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT**

The Parliament of New South Wales is directly elected by the people to make state laws, control state finances, and discuss matters of importance to the people of New South Wales. Parliamentary elections determine the State Government formed by the party with majority support in the Lower House.

Parliament is the legislative arm of the three elements in the system of government. The other two are the executive (the Cabinet) and the judiciary (judges and courts). Each has separate functions and acts to balance the power of the others.

The State Premier and Ministers (the Cabinet) develop policy and carry out the laws through government departments. They remain members of Parliament and are responsible to it.

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The Parliament of New South Wales acknowledges the traditional owners of this land, the Cadigal people of the Eora nation.

The Upper House of the Parliament of New South Wales, the Legislative Council, has 42 Members, each serving eight-year terms. Half stand for re-election every four years.

Members are elected on a state-wide basis in proportion to the total vote their party received. Consequently, no major party has held a majority since 1988 and the House has a broad and diverse representation of minor parties and groups.

Most bills commence in the Lower House and the Council is primarily a house of review, taking a second look at, and often amending, bills. However, bills can originate in either House.

The powers and procedures of both Houses of Parliament are broadly similar although the Council cannot block money bills such as the Budget. After their passage through both Houses, bills go to the Governor of New South Wales for assent to become law.

The Legislative Council Chamber is a prefabricated cast-iron building manufactured in Scotland and originally shipped to Victoria. It was erected at Parliament House in 1856 to accommodate the Council when the bicameral parliamentary system was created. In the early 1980s the chamber was restored to its 1892 appearance.

Visiting Parliament House

Parliament House is in Macquarie Street, Sydney, almost opposite Martin Place.

Parliament House, including displays and information, is open weekdays from 9:00am to 5:00pm.

On non-sitting days, regular legislative chambers tours are conducted. Group tours should be booked by phoning 02 9230 3444.

On sitting days, visitors are welcome to view proceedings from the public galleries. Visits are free.

Finding Out More

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