

EASY GUIDE TO PARLIAMENT

By the Office of Colleen Hartland MLC

Members Statement

Tuesdays at approx 3.10pm, Wednesdays and Thursdays at approx 9.40am.

90 second statement on any topic. Each member can make one statement a week. There is no formal response or debate, but it can be useful for raising an issue and media interest.

Questions Without Notice (ie “Question Time”)

Tuesdays at 2pm, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 12 noon.

Advantage: The Minister has to respond immediately. The media often attends. Good for current news and events, and if an answer is needed quickly. Sometimes unexpected results.

Disadvantage: Not always the best way of getting detailed information.

The Greens are allocated 3 questions out of 40 in a 4 day rotation, so that means one question 3 days out of 4. This means the Greens generally get two, or sometimes three questions each week. They prefer to ask questions of Ministers that are in the Legislative Council (the Treasurer, Environment & Climate Change, Planning, Industry and Trade / Major Projects).

The rules on what may be asked are similar to the rules for “Questions On Notice”. That is, *ask for information* (not opinion or policy). Sometimes questions may be unexpected, such as whether the Minister intends to attend an event, or whether the Minister is aware of something. Once the question has been answered, an additional question may be put that’s related to the minister’s original answer.

Questions On Notice

This is a formal way of writing to a Minister *for information* and obtaining a written response. The Minister must respond within 30 days. The question and the response are recorded in Hansard.

Advantage: Can be addressed to any Minister (including in the Legislative Assembly). The question can be detailed. Some responses have been useful for community groups having difficulty with FoI requests. Members can submit as many Questions on Notice as they wish.

Disadvantage: The answers are not always useful. The Questions often take a while to prepare, as they are detailed and must conform to the parliamentary format.

The Greens have prepared a separate “plain language” guide to Questions on Notice. Anyone wanting to suggest a Question on Notice should read this guide and make a first draft. Basically, the question should *ask for information* (not opinion or policy) that is not already on the public record.

Adjournments

Advantage: Minister must respond within 30 days. Can be addressed to any Minister (including in the Legislative Assembly). Members may contribute one adjournment each day.

The Adjournment debate starts after the house adjourns for the day and runs for about half an hour to an hour.

An adjournment allows a member to outline an issue in three minutes and then ask the Minister *to do something*. It can't contain any other question or request for information. The Minister on duty sometimes makes a brief verbal response, but the minister to whom it is addressed must respond in writing within 30 days. The response is recorded in Hansard.

Legislation

All changes to legislation are debated in Parliament, via bills. Most bills come from the Government. The Greens MLCs consult with community groups and individuals before responding in Parliament, and deciding together how to vote.

The Greens can attempt to make changes (amendments) to bills, to prevent a harmful impact, or create a beneficial impact. They need as much notice as possible to prepare, and have the amendment drafted.

Motions and Private Member's Bills ("Non Government Business")

Motions and Private Member's Bills are debated on Wednesdays.

Both of these are slow processes. They need a lot of time and resources and the support of other parties to be successful. The Greens allocate them according to portfolio as with government bills.

Motions

Advantage: Generates a debate, and a vote. Most motions are simply a chance to debate issues, although some have resulted in useful references to parliamentary committees.

Disadvantage: All non government parties have to agree before a motion can be debated. The majority of motions that are listed on the notice paper are never debated.

Examples: Colleen Hartland's motion for the government to take action on the Tottenham Chlorine Fire and Sue Pennicuik's motion to refer the economics of Channel Deepening to the Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration.

Private Members Bills

The Greens MLCs can have bills drafted, to change Victorian law pursuant to Greens policies. In order to be successful, the bill would need to pass in both the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly.