



Abolition of Legislative Council

For teachers

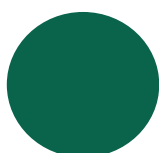
Queensland is the only State Parliament in Australia that is unicameral, after we abolished the Legislative Council in 1922. But; how did it happen and what impact has this had on the way we make law in Queensland?

Case study

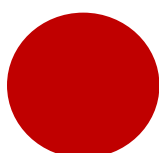
The 1st Parliament

On 6 June 1859, Queen Victoria signed the Letters Patent, which saw Queensland become a separate colony. The Queensland Parliament initially had two houses, the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. We call this a bicameral parliament.

Queensland Parliament (1860)



Legislative
Assembly



Legislative
Council



Monarch

Key terms

Bicameral: A bicameral legislature has two chambers.

Camera (Latin): Chamber or room.

Unicameral: A unicameral legislature has one chamber.

Eligible voters elected members to sit in the Legislative Assembly. In contrast, the Governor appointed members of the Legislative Council.



DURATION

2 to 3 lessons

LEVEL

Year 10 to 12

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Students will be able to:

- Describe what is meant by the terms unicameral and bicameral parliament.
- Explain how we became a unicameral parliament and its implications.
- Examine viewpoints and their consequences on law-making.
- Analyse strengths and weaknesses of parliament as a law-making body.

INQUIRY QUESTION

How did Queensland transition to a unicameral parliament and how did this impact law-making?



STUDENT ACTIVITY 1

The way people are chosen to sit in an upper house can differ from place to place.

1. **Select** one house to research from the following list:
 - Canada—*Sénat du Canada* (Senate of Canada)
 - Italy—*Senato della Repubblica* (Senate of the Republic)
 - India—*Rajya Sabha* (Council of States)
 - France—*Sénat* (Senate)
 - Ireland—*Seanad Éireann* (Senate of Ireland)

2. **Locate** the official website of that house and another website (2 sources in total) and **select** information on how a member is chosen or elected.
3. **Create** an infographic that explains how a member is chosen or elected.
4. **Compare** how this is similar or different to the process used in Queensland in 1860.



Like the law-making process used in the Australian Parliament today, when Queensland Parliament first sat, a Bill needed to be passed by both houses—the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council—and be given Royal Assent to become a law.

Key terms

Bill: A proposed (or draft) law.

Royal Assent: The formal approval of Bill to become an Act by the Monarch or their representative (the Governor).

What did people think of the Legislative Council?

From its inception, the Legislative Council was criticised by members of the community.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 2

Source 1—Letters to the Editor, *The Courier*, 12 August 1861 (Extract)

Why then, Sir, should we be burdened with an institution into which men of respect, men of integrity, and men of talent, are unwilling to enter, because if such men will not accept seats to become nominees, what then? Why, the house must be filled, and it may happen to us some future day that our ministry may be the mere creatures of the Governor, and trained to look to him with great veneration; and these may fill our House of Lords with brainless gobemouches, political drones and servile renegades, tools of the ministry, or hangers-on to the skirts of the Governor—needy vampires waiting to suck the nation's blood...

Source 2—‘A Refuge for Destitute Legislators’, *The Week*, 23 July 1881 (Extract)

...the Legislative Council has been a refuge for political outcasts. We do not use this designation in any sinister sense. An outcast is one who has been cast out or expelled. Nearly all the nominations by the present Government have been men who have been rejected by different constituencies as candidates for the Assembly. The popular vote has pronounced them to be unfit for Legislature.

1. **Highlight** any words that you are unfamiliar with and discuss these as a class.
2. **Compare** and **contrast** the characteristics the author of Source 1 believes a member of parliament should possess and those of ‘our House of Lords’ (the Legislative Council).
3. **Infer** what the author of Source 2 means by referring to the nominated individuals as ‘political outcasts.’

4. **State** whether the authors of Source 1 and Source 2 support the Legislative Council members or are critical of them. **Locate** and **select** evidence (such as a quote) from each source to support your point of view.

The abolition movement gains momentum

According to [Documenting a Democracy](#) the ‘Legislative Council, as a non-elected body, represented conservative and at times, reactionary, policies reflecting the interests of wealth and privilege.’

Some people felt the Legislative Council was a barrier to the creation of important social and legal reforms sought by elected members of the Legislative Assembly. Others viewed the Legislative Council as a crucial check against the concentration of power.

Between 1915 and 1920 the Labor Government, led initially by Premier [Thomas Joseph ‘TJ’ Ryan](#) and later Premier [Edward Granville Theodore](#), tried to abolish the Legislative Council by:

- introducing Bills aimed at its abolition, and
- holding a referendum.

However, these efforts were unsuccessful, and the Legislative Council remained in place. It was not until 1920 when Lieutenant-Governor William Lennon appointed more Labor-aligned members to the Council that its abolition had a real chance of success.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 3

We will now re-create part of the Second Reading Debate of the Constitution Act Amendment Bill 1921 using a role play. The role play was created using the Record of Proceedings (Hansard), a primary source.

At the conclusion of the role play—

We will now begin to examine the viewpoints raised in the Legislative Assembly about abolishing the Legislative Council and their consequences on law-making in Queensland.

1. Re-read each of the speeches given by Members of Parliament in the role play.
2. **Identify** and **select** any positive (strengths) or negative (weaknesses) viewpoints related to the abolition of the Legislative Council and its impact on law-making in Queensland. It may be a good idea to colour the viewpoints using highlighters or colours. As a class, **create** a list that **summarises** the key arguments for and against the proposed law.
3. **Examine** two of these viewpoints and their consequences using the *Examining Viewpoints* Graphic Organiser on the next page.



Analysing *viewpoints*

A viewpoint is an attitude, opinion or perspective about a legal issue (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Legal Studies 2025 General Senior Syllabus*, 2024).

<div><div>1</div><div>Identify and examine two different relevant viewpoints on the abolition of the Legislative Council.</div></div>			
<div>Not sure how to examine a viewpoint. Think about:</div> <div><div><div>Viewpoint</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">What is a perspective on the legal issue?What legal principles or rights are being supported or challenged by the viewpoint?</div><div><div>Rationale</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">What are the reasons behind the viewpoint?How is the viewpoint being justified?What caused the viewpoint?</div><div><div>Evidence</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Select one or two quotes to support the viewpoint. Ensure you identify who you are quoting using the footnote in the script.</div></div>			
Viewpoint 1			
Viewpoint 2			



2

Examine the consequences of the viewpoint on law-making in Queensland.

Not sure how to connect a viewpoint to their consequences? Think about:



Short term consequence(s) on the law, legal system, legal principles or rights

- Who may be affected the most by the viewpoint? This can be an individual, a group, or the community.
- What impact may be experienced directly or soon afterwards if this viewpoint is adopted?

Long term consequence(s) on the law, legal system, legal principles or rights

- What future impact may be felt over time (such as today) as a result of the viewpoint being accepted?

Viewpoint 1

Viewpoint 2

Which viewpoint is the most convincing and why?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 4

Imagine you are a Member of the Legislative Assembly in 1921.

Take a position on this issue by physically placing yourself along an imaginary line in the classroom. One end of the line represents 'strongly agree' with abolishing the Legislative Council, and the other end represents 'strongly disagree.' You can also stand anywhere in between, depending on how you feel.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Once everyone has chosen a spot, your teacher will ask some of you about why you chose your position. Be prepared to explain your reasoning with evidence or examples.

EXTENSION WRITING TASK

In *Student Activity 4* we asked you to take a position on whether the Legislative Council should be abolished, like those Members of Parliament in 1921.

Now you have a position, have listened to others' viewpoints, know more about the strengths and weaknesses of Queensland's law-making process, you can practice your writing skills with an extended paragraph that responds to the question—*Should the Legislative Council be abolished?*

You are welcome to use the TEEEL structure below or use a structure you have learnt in class.

Letter	Type	Description
T	Topic Sentence	This sentence introduces the TOPIC —what is the main idea or argument you will be exploring.
E	Expand	EXPAND on your topic sentence, giving us more information.
E	Evidence	Provide EVIDENCE —this could be facts, a quote, statistics, findings or examples.
E	Explain	EXPLAIN the evidence further. When explaining something you may use terms such as: ...this may result in ...as a consequence ...therefore
L	Link	LINK back to the first sentence.

The end of the Legislative Council

With a majority of Members of Parliament being aligned with the Labor Party in both houses, the Constitution Act Amendment Bill 1921 was passed.

COUNCIL ABOLITION BILL MORE BREAKING OF PLEDGES TO PEOPLE AND PARTY

BRISBANE, October 26

In the Legislative Council to-day, the debate was resumed on the motion for the second reading of the Legislative Council Abolition Bill, the first reading of which was carried late last night.

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The motion was carried.

The bill was also passed through Committee and read a third time.

Source: 'Council Abolition Bill', *Morning Bulletin*, (Rockhampton), 27 October 1921, Page 8 (Extract).

Royal Assent was given on 3 March 1922, and the Act was proclaimed on 23 March 1922.

EXIT TICKET

Draw an outline of your hand. On the palm, write down what you think was the main idea or main takeaway from these lessons.
On each finger, write down one small fact that you learnt.

Additional resources and links

- ABC, *Why does Queensland not have an upper house?*—
abc.net.au/listen/programs/nightlife/queensland-upper/13786060
- Governor of Queensland, *Opening of the Centenary of the Abolition of the Queensland Legislative Council Seminar*—govhouse.qld.gov.au/the-governor-of-queensland/speeches/opening-of-the-centenary-of-the-abolition-of-the-queensland-legislative-council-seminar
- Museum of Australian Democracy, *Constitution Act Amendment Act 1922 (Qld)*—
foundingdocs.gov.au/item-did-63.html
- Queensland Parliament, *Abolition of the Legislative Council*—
documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/explore/education/factsheets/Factsheet_3.20_AbolitionOfTheLegislativeCouncil.pdf
- Queensland Parliament, *Abolition of the Legislative Council*—
documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/Explore/Education/classroomActivities/overview/AbolitionLegCouncil.pdf