



## Voting in the Queensland Parliament

### Making decisions in the Chamber

In the Queensland parliament, all questions are decided by members of parliament voting. When a vote is called, the Speaker states the question to be decided and the members present respond by saying 'aye' or 'no'. The Speaker then announces whether they feel the majority voted for the 'ayes' or for the 'noes'. This is called voting 'on the voices'.

Any member who has voted against the majority as declared by the Speaker may then call "divide" if they wish a formal vote to occur. The Speaker must then order a division whereby the number of votes for each side are formally counted and a record is produced showing how each member has voted.

### Ringling the division bells

When the Speaker announces that a division has been called, electronic bells are rung throughout the parliamentary complex. This lets members who are not in the parliamentary Chamber know that a division has been called and gives them time to get to the Chamber and vote. The bells ring for four minutes.

### Locking the Chamber doors

When the bells have stopped ringing, the doors of the Chamber are locked. After that, members cannot enter or leave until the division is finished.

### Party voting

The Queensland parliament adopted amendments to its *Standing Rules and Orders* on 11 February 2014, introducing a party voting system for divisions. Party voting involves a block of votes being put forward on behalf of members of a party when a division is called in the parliament. This method of voting is also used in the Legislative Assembly of Victoria and New Zealand's parliament and is designed to

streamline the voting process. Party voting maintains all opportunities for each individual member of parliament to vote as they choose during divisions.

The procedure for party voting is outlined below (as contained in section 106 of the *Standing Rules and Orders*):

(1) When the bars have been closed, the Speaker shall state the question to the House.

(2) To cast their votes, members must sit in their allocated places in the Chamber. Unless they have

advised their Whip that they intend to cast a contrary vote, each member of the parties that make up the

government or official opposition are deemed to be voting to support the response of their party members given at the time the Speaker originally put the question.

(3) Members of the parties that make up the government or official opposition that intend casting a

contrary vote must advise their Whip. These Members must then also advise the Clerk of their intention

to cast a contrary vote and indicate whether they are voting for the "Ayes" or "Noes".

(4) Members of minor parties, recognised parties or independents must sign a tally sheet provided by the

Clerk indicating whether they are voting for the "Ayes" or "Noes".

(5) The Government Whip, Opposition Whip and Clerk will report the number of "Ayes" or "Noes".

The report must only relate to votes cast by members present in the Chamber and every member present must vote. The votes will be reported in the following order:

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- (i) The Speaker asks the Government Whip, to report the government party's votes.
- (ii) The Speaker asks the Opposition Whip, to report the official opposition party's vote.
- (iii) The Speaker asks the Clerk, to report the votes of other members that have reported to the Clerk

in accordance with (3) or (4) above. The Clerk will report the votes by party or electorate.

(6) Any Member may before the result of the vote is announced by the Speaker, challenge the report of

votes reported by the Government Whip, Opposition Whip or the Clerk. If a report is challenged, the

Speaker may direct that the report stand, be corrected or that the matter be resolved by a personal vote.

(7) The Speaker announces the result to the House.

(8) The Government Whip and Opposition Whip will immediately provide the Clerk the names of those

members of their party that were not present for the vote.

(9) The Clerk will record the result of the vote and the names of those members voting "Aye" and "No"

and publish those details in the Record of Proceedings.

(10) If fewer than five members vote with either the "Ayes" or the "Noes", the Clerk will record whether

the question was agreed to or not in the Record of Proceedings but the result of the vote and the names of

members voting will not be recorded in accordance with (9) above.

(11) If an error occurs in any record of result, the error shall be reported to the House by the Speaker at

the earliest practical time and the Record of Proceeding altered.

(12) In this Standing Order a reference to Government Whip, Opposition Whip or the Clerk includes a reference to their delegates.

### Conscience debates

When a party decides that a particular issue will be a conscience debate, Members belonging to that party are able to vote according to their own beliefs rather than being bound by their party conventions to vote in support of that party's position on an issue. While conscience debates are rare in the Queensland parliament, they generally attract much interest and attention. Some recent examples of conscience debates in the Queensland parliament were for the following bills:

- Civil Partnerships Bill 2011
- Surrogacy Bill 2009
- Prohibition of Human Cloning Bill 2003
- Regulation of Research Involving Human Embryos and Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill 2003

A party whip will advise the Speaker in advance if their party is to have a conscience debate on an upcoming division.

### Personal votes

The procedure for voting in a conscience debate will be by 'personal voting' rather than 'party voting'. A personal vote will also be held if a whip challenges the result of a party vote. The procedure for personal voting will follow the process for how divisions previously occurred in the Queensland parliament prior to the introduction of party voting.

This procedure is outlined below (as contained in section 107 of the *Standing Rules and Orders*):

- (1) When the bars have been closed, the Speaker shall state the question to the House, and then direct the "Ayes" to proceed to the right of the Chair and the "Noes" to the left.
- (2) After members have divided, the Speaker shall appoint two tellers from each side. If two tellers cannot be found for one side of the question, the Speaker must immediately declare the resolution of the House. The member who called for the division may ask for their dissent to be recorded in the Record of Proceedings. The Speaker then directs the Clerk to record that dissent.

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- (3) The tellers shall count the members voting and record the vote of each member present on the division sheets.
- (4) A member may not change their vote once the tellers have been appointed.
- (5) The tellers shall report the numbers to the Speaker.
- (6) The Speaker shall announce the result of the division to the House.
- (7) In case of confusion or error concerning the numbers reported, unless it can be otherwise corrected, the House shall proceed to another division on the question.
- (8) The names of the members who have voted are recorded in the Record of Proceedings.

### Tied result

If there are an equal number of votes for the 'ayes' and 'noes', the Speaker has a casting vote. The Speaker may give reasons for the casting vote and those reasons are entered in the Record of Proceedings.

### Members arranging not to attend a division (pairing)

Sometimes a member knows that they will miss a division. The member can arrange for another member to be absent too. The other member must intend to vote the opposite way, therefore reducing the votes for both the 'ayes' and 'noes' by one. This is called pairing. Pairing is not an officially recognised procedure of the Legislative Assembly, simply an agreement between members.