

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Speaker of the House of Assembly

The Speaker is the most important Member of the House of Assembly. The Speaker has many roles, including the essential role of chairing the sittings (meetings) of the House of Assembly. The Speaker ensures that the House follows correct parliamentary procedure and that parliamentary debates are conducted fairly for all Members. Given the importance of their work, the Speaker is held in high regard by all Members of Parliament.

➔ What does the Speaker do?

The Speaker has many duties, but some of the main ones are:

1. The main spokesperson for the House of Assembly

The title of Speaker originates in the Westminster Parliament in the United Kingdom. Historically, the Speaker 'spoke' to the Monarch, reporting the decisions of Parliament. Today in the House of Assembly, the Speaker speaks on behalf of the House to the Governor of Tasmania, Legislative Council, or persons outside the Parliament. Official communication from the House of Assembly is signed by the Speaker.

The Speaker welcomes important visitors to Parliament House and represents the House of Assembly at official ceremonies.

2. Chairing the sittings of the House of Assembly

On parliamentary sitting days, a major part of the Speaker's work is to preside over (chair) the House of Assembly sittings. The Speaker must ensure that the House of Assembly correctly follows its written rules, the Standing Orders. In addition, depending on the business before the House, the Speaker must ensure all Members are 'given the call' or an opportunity to speak if they wish to do so.



Most House of Assembly debates are conducted respectfully with the majority of Members agreeing on an issue. However, sometimes Members fundamentally disagree on the issue, and the debate becomes heated. It is the Speaker's responsibility to maintain order in the House of Assembly.

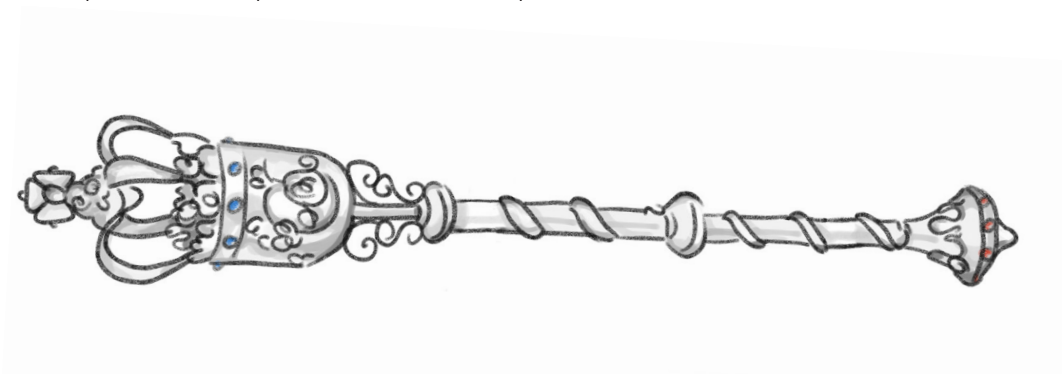
Other times, Members may call the Speaker's attention to a 'Point of Order', believing a Standing Order has been broken. The Speaker considers the rules and gives a ruling or an instruction to the Members on how to proceed.

3. Administration of the Parliament of Tasmania

The Speaker is responsible for the House of Assembly's workings, and with the President of the Legislative Council, the workings of the whole Parliament of Tasmania. To enable them to do this, the Speaker is a member of some of the Parliament of Tasmania Committees that monitor the administrative aspects of the Parliament.

4. Represents their electorate

Each of the five House of Assembly electorates have five elected Members of Parliament. Like all Members of Parliament, the Speaker represents Tasmanians in their electorate whilst also considering the whole State's needs. To help them do this well, the Speaker has an office within their electorate and in Parliament House. Community groups and individuals can visit, phone or email the Speaker's electorate office to raise problems or concerns with the Speaker. Acting as a local Member, the Speaker can help tackle or resolve the problem.



The Mace is the symbol of the Speaker's authority.



What is the Speaker's Procession?

At the beginning and end of each sitting day, the Sergeant-at-Arms, carrying the Mace, leads the Speaker in and out of the House of Assembly Chamber. During the Speaker's Procession, all Members and visitors stand in silence as a sign of respect for the Speaker.

The origins of the Speaker's Procession are uncertain. However, it is most likely that in the early days of the United Kingdom's Parliament, the Sergeant-at-Arms was responsible for ensuring the physical safety of the Speaker in the Chamber. For hundreds of years, it has been the Speaker's responsibility to report the Parliament's decisions to the Monarch. This could be very dangerous for the Speaker, particularly if the Monarch did not like the Parliament's decisions. On many occasions, the Monarch punished the Speaker, with seven Speakers beheaded between 1394 and 1535.

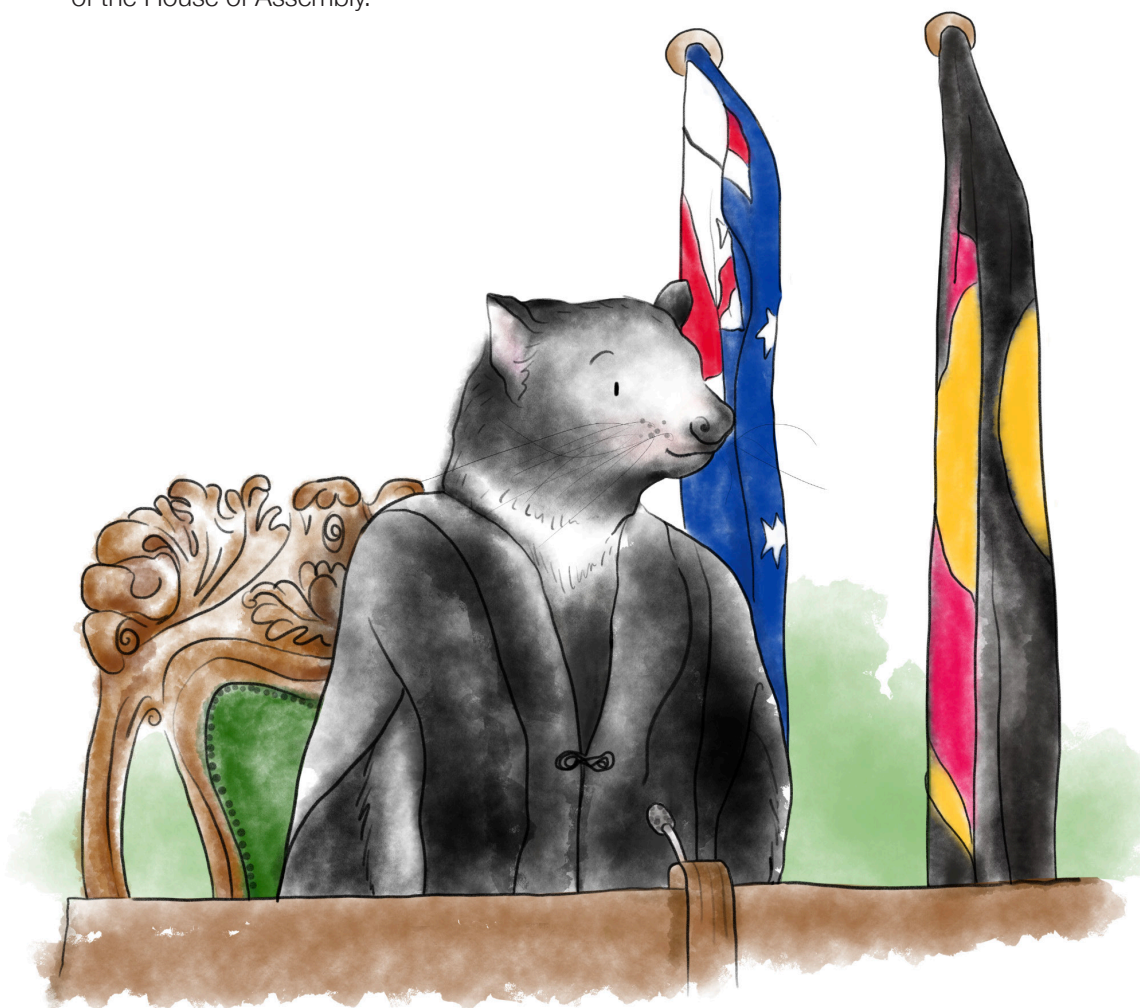


The Sergeant-at-Arms carrying the Mace leads the Speaker in and out of the House of Assembly Chamber.



What does the Speaker wear?

The Speaker's attire or outfit is the choice of the Speaker of the day. In the early Tasmanian Parliaments, the Speaker wore a highly formal outfit consisting of a wig, jabot (lace garment worn at the neck), knee breeches, silk stockings and a black gown or a combination of these. Today some Speakers have retained the gown while others prefer no ceremonial dress. In the House, the Speaker is referred to as 'Mr Speaker' or 'Madam Speaker'. This formal title is a sign of respect for the position as the most senior Member of the House of Assembly.



Many Speakers of the House of Assembly wear a black gown in the Chamber.



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