

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Speaker

of the House of Assembly

The Speaker of the House is the Presiding Officer in the House of Assembly. Elected to the role by the other Members of the House of Assembly, they preside over the sittings of the House. Considered the guardian of the House, the Speaker must maintain the integrity and independence of the House, safeguarding its authority whilst protecting its Members.

As the Speaker represents the House of Assembly, which in turn represents the people of Tasmania, the position of Speaker is treated with honour and respect.



View of the House of Assembly from the Speaker's Chair.

The Speaker and Representational Parliament

Approximately every four years, the people of Tasmania elect Members to the House of Assembly to represent them in the Parliament of Tasmania. The political party or parties with the majority support of the House form Government. Normally, the Government of the day will nominate one of its Members as a candidate for Speaker of the House. This is commonly followed by a successful election to the office.

Election of the Speaker

The Speaker is pivotal to the operation of the House of Assembly. The Tasmanian *Constitution Act 1934*, s 24(1) provides that the House “at its first meeting after a general election, and before proceeding to the despatch of any other business, shall elect one of its Members to the Speaker thereof.” The Clerk of the House conducts the election of the Speaker with the procedures prescribed in the House of Assembly’s written rules, the Standing Orders.

The House commonly elects a Speaker with years of parliamentary experience. This is because the Speaker’s role requires a deep understanding of parliamentary principles and the subsequent application of these principles. Profound respect, not only for the traditions of the House but an understanding of what lies beyond the traditions, is crucial to the role.



*As the Presiding Officer, the Speaker's Chair is in an elevated position.
The Chair of Committees occupies the centre seat in front of the Speaker.*

The Speaker is elected to the office by the House itself and can be removed from the office by a vote of the House, although currently there is no precedent in the House of Assembly to remove a Speaker by such a vote. Historically, Speakers have ceased to hold the office due to resignation, loss of seat at an election or not standing for re-election at a general election.

A Deputy Speaker is also elected at the beginning of a new Parliament to assist the Speaker with their work. This assistance includes the role of Chair of Committees, a significant role when the House moves to the Committee of the whole House when debating legislation. In the absence of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker performs their duties.

The Impartiality of the Speaker

The Speaker of the House aims to act in an apolitical manner. This impartiality is an indispensable condition for the role and by demonstrating this, the Speaker retains the confidence of the House.

Unlike in the United Kingdom's House of Commons, the Speaker of the House of Assembly remains a member of their political party, potentially presiding over sittings when the business before the House may involve intensely questioning the decisions and actions of their own party. While not required to resign from their party, most Speakers aim to partially withdraw from the hurly-burly of Tasmanian politics for fear of damaging the Office of the Speaker's reputation, ensuring the office remains above the individual.



The Speaker's Chair, made of blackwood, was originally used in the Legislative Council Chamber.

The Speaker and the Separation of Powers

The Speaker is a member of the Legislature but not of the Executive. While the significant responsibilities of the Speakership are often likened to a 'Ministry', the Speaker is not a Minister of the Crown. In simple terms, the Speaker is not part of Cabinet. The Speaker's loyalty is to the Legislature, protecting and enabling the House of Assembly to fulfil its functions so that all Members of the House of Assembly can participate fairly in debates and votes in the House.

The Speaker and Responsible Government

In essence, the principle of 'Responsible Government' is that the party (or alliance of parties) holds Government while they enjoy the 'confidence' or majority support of the House of Assembly.

The Speaker is usually a member of the governing party but as an impartial Presiding Officer generally holds themselves at arm's distance from Government business, especially within the Chamber. The Speaker will be required to chair House business that tests the House's confidence in the Government of the day, or an individual's capacity to serve as a Member of Parliament, as well as when controversial legislation is debated where parties or Members have conflicting views. At all times, the Speaker's impartiality is essential to ensure parliamentary debate and practice proceeds fairly for all Members.



Acts of Parliament, also known as statutes, are printed, bound and sit in the House of Assembly Chamber. In modern times, legislation can also be accessed online.

The Speaker and Lawmaking

Whilst legislating is a core function of the House of Assembly, the Speaker presides over the passage of legislation rather than personally contributing to debate as a Member of the House. By not participating in debates, the Speaker is protected from any potential political agenda within a debate; thus the House retains the confidence in the impartiality of the Speaker. However, the Speaker does sit on some Parliamentary Committees (e.g. House of Assembly Standing Orders Committee and House of Assembly Privileges and Conduct Committee). Each of these Committees are relevant to the role of Speaker, as they relate to the powers and procedures of the House and the administration of the Parliament.