

## 22 Making Laws

Governments make laws. But who decides what ideas will be put to parliament, and how are those ideas turned into laws that we have to follow?

### **Where New Laws Come From**

The idea for a new law may be part of a government's policies, or members of the community may convince the government that a certain law or change to a law is a good idea.

Pressure groups (also called lobby groups) appeal directly to government ministers to try to persuade them to make certain laws. For example, the Minister for Health may be lobbied by groups involved in delivering medical services, such as the Australian Medical Association (AMA), nurses' unions, private hospital owners, health insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies and state health ministers.

The views of all these groups, combined with the general policies of the government, will help the minister decide which laws to suggest to Cabinet (all the senior government ministers). Cabinet will then approve or reject the idea.

### **Ideas into Law**

Every law starts as a Bill, which is presented by a member of parliament. Usually, Bills are written and presented to parliament by a member of the Executive (the Prime Minister or one of the ministers). Public servants skilled in law usually help to write the Bills to ensure they are not open to misinterpretation and do not contravene the Constitution. Many laws are made by simply changing (amending) an existing law.

Each Bill is 'read' (presented) to the House of Representatives three times. The first reading announces that the law is being proposed. During the second reading, the Bill is debated. Usually the government supports the Bill and the opposition speaks against it, although sometimes a Bill receives bipartisan support (both parties vote for it).

Most Bills then go to the committee stage (usually between the second and third reading), where a group of members (from both sides) make adjustments and improvements. The public are also able to make submissions to the committee. The third reading is when the Bill is voted on. The government will nearly always win this vote as it has the majority of members.

### **The Senate**

The Bill is then presented and debated in the Senate. It is 'read' three times. Sometimes the government does not have a majority of members in the Senate, and has to rely on the support of independents or smaller parties. Often amendments (changes) are made to the Bill in the Senate.

If the Senate passes the Bill, it is presented to the Governor-General who signs it and gives assent for it to become law, also known as an Act of Parliament.



*These people are trying to convince politicians to change laws concerning the environment.*



*The House of Representatives (Lower House) of the Federal Parliament*