

Australia, a constitutional monarchy

Australia's constitutional monarchy is a system of parliamentary government. It is a democracy with a monarch as its head of state. The powers of Australia's Head of State, its government (the Executive), its parliament (the Legislature) and its legal system (the Judiciary) are set out by laws written in the constitution.

Australia shares its monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, with Britain and the other Commonwealth countries. The Queen and members of the royal family value their close connections with Commonwealth countries, including Australia. The Queen's eldest son, the Prince of Wales, was sent from England as a teenager to attend an Australian school. He enjoyed this experience and claims that he still feels very much at home here.



The governor-general and six state governors represent the Queen in Australia. Initially these governors were British peers, selected by their monarch. Before 1965, Queen Elizabeth selected and appointed the governors, but since then they have been selected by an Australian prime minister or a state premier. They are not part of the government and their roles are mainly ceremonial.

The Commonwealth of Australia's Constitution, or rules of government, was written in 1901. This was at Federation when the six separate British colonies united and became one nation. It sets out a system of government, similar to the United Kingdom's Westminster system based on the famous 800-year-old document known as Magna Carta.

The Constitution defines how the government operates and which issues parliament can pass laws on. The three arms of Australia's government are: the parliament which makes the laws, the government which upholds the laws and the legal system which enforces the laws. Unlike in many other democracies, including the United States, the governments of Australia and Britain do not totally control their countries. These governments are answerable to parliament. Nor do they control the courts, because according to our Constitutions, no-one can be above the law.

Six state governments have their own constitutions as well as their parliaments, governments and laws. Each head of state or governor, like the governor-general, has limited power and is independent of the state's parliamentary government.

1. True or False?

(a) In Australia the Queen is represented by seven governors.

True	False
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(b) The Queen is Australia's Head of State.

True	False
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(c) The Australian Government is controlled by a monarch.

True	False
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(d) Australian governments make all the country's laws.

True	False
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(e) The Constitution is over 100-years-old and is no longer used.

True	False
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(f) The states all have the same constitution.

True	False
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