

# The Westminster system of government

Westminster is the name of the system of parliamentary democracy used in Britain which began with the signing of Magna Carta. Australia's system of government, although different from Britain's, follows the basic principles of the Westminster system.

It is called a **responsible government**, not because it acts responsibly, but unlike many others, our government is **responsible or accountable to parliament**.

The key features of Australia's parliamentary government include:

- Separation of the powers of: the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary
- Head of State (ceremonial), who is not the Head of Government
- The Legislature: laws passed by an elected parliament with two chambers
- The Executive: the ministry of the political party with a majority in the lower house, led by the prime minister (the Head of Government)
- The Judiciary: to decide/enforce matters of law, independent of government
- Federation: consisting of six states and two self-governed territories

1. Before being signed by the governor-general, new laws are passed by:
  - (a) the prime minister      (b) Parliament      (c) the government

2. An original 1297 Magna Carta is encased in an airtight glass case and it has pride of place in Parliament House in Canberra. Explain why this old document is so important to Australia.

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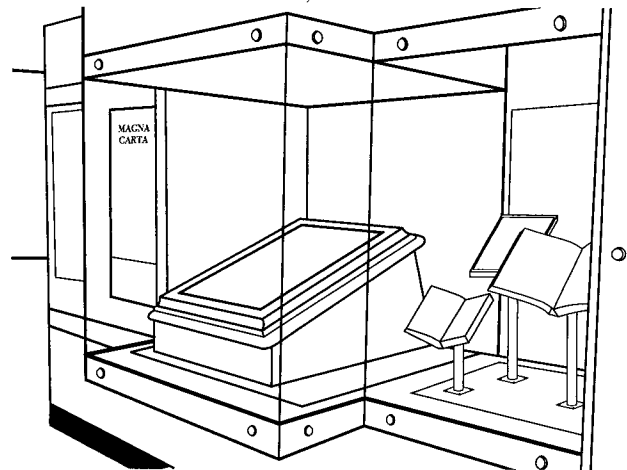
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3. (a) Write two facts you already know about this Magna Carta.

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- (b) Write two questions you would like to have answered about it.

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- (c) After doing some research, record at least three more facts you now know about it.

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