

How laws are made

The Assembly makes laws on territory issues such as hospitals, schools, and transport, as well as local issues such as pet registration, libraries, and rubbish and recycling.

Where do ideas for laws come from?

Ideas for new laws can come from many places, including:

- Party policies
- Election promises
- Public feedback
- The public service, and
- Agreements between Australian governments.

These ideas come to the Assembly as draft laws called 'bills'. Most bills are introduced by the government – this is the benefit of winning an election. However, any member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) can introduce a bill.

How a bill becomes law

Step one: Drafting

A member takes their idea for a law to the Parliamentary Counsel's Office (PCO), a special office made up of lawyers who specialise in writing laws. The member and PCO work together to draft the bill until the member is happy with it. The bill is then ready to be presented to the Assembly.

Step two: Presentation

The bill is presented in the Assembly chamber by the member who helped draft it. They give a short speech sharing what the bill is about after which they adjourn (or pause) debate until a later date. This allows time for other members and the community to read and consider the bill.

Stage three: Inquiry and scrutiny

Standing orders (the Assembly's rules) require that all bills are sent to two committees after they are presented. Committees are small groups of members that do detailed work on certain subject matters.

The bill is sent to the scrutiny committee to check that it is compatible with the *Human Rights Act 2004* and is written using good legal practices.

The bill is also sent to a relevant subject area committee. They can choose to either hold a public inquiry into the bill, or to send it back to the chamber without one.

Both committees must report back to the Assembly before the bill can progress any further.

Step four: Agreement in principle

After returning from committees, the bill is debated and voted on for a first time. At this step, any member may speak and share whether they agree or disagree with general ideas of the bill. Debate is closed by the member who presented the bill.

After the debate, members vote on whether they agree with the bill 'in principle' – whether they think the general idea of the bill is good. This vote can have one of two outcomes:

- If a majority vote **yes**, the bill moves on to the next stage.
- If a majority vote **no** or the vote is **tied** (an even numbers of yes and no votes), the bill stops and does not go any further.

Members may reintroduce a bill that has failed to pass again, but they must wait at least one year before doing so. This keeps the Assembly from considering the same issue repeatedly.

Stage five: Detail stage

The purpose of the detail stage is to let members look at the specific parts of the bill and add, remove, or change them. Proposals to change a bill are called amendments. Any member may propose an amendment. To change a bill, a majority of members must agree by vote.

Sometimes bills don't need to be amended, so the Assembly can vote to skip this stage. If a majority of members agree, the bill moves to its final vote.

Stage six: Agreement

This is the final vote on the bill. It may look different now to how it looked when it was presented because of amendments made during the detail stage.

There is no debate during this stage. To pass, the bill must have a majority of members support the bill. If a majority do not support it or there is a tie, the bill stops and does not go any further

Stage seven: Notification

The ACT does not have a vice-regal representative such as a governor or administrator to sign bills into law like everywhere else in Australia. Instead, we have a process called 'notification'.

The Clerk of the Assembly checks the bill for any mistakes and signs it. Then, the Speaker writes to PCO to request the bill be 'notified' on the Legislation Register – the website where all laws for the ACT are listed.

When PCO changes the bill's status on the website, it has the same effect as a governor signing a bill, authorising it as a law. No longer a draft law, the bill is now called an Act.