



# Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) Year 4

## Local government and the community

**Inquiry question:** How can local government contribute to community life?

**Learning objectives:** Students will investigate ways the ACT Legislative Assembly contributes to change in the ACT community. Students will investigate how matters are brought to the attention of the parliament and discussed as a Matter of Public Importance (MPI) as well as discussing the role local and state government have in providing services to the community.

**Resources:** All resources are linked or attached to this lesson plan and include:

- Resource links:
  - Website links to ACTsmart straws suck campaign:
    - <https://www.actsmart.act.gov.au/what-can-i-do/business/straws-suck>
    - [https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/1257837/Straws-Suck-ACTsmart-campaign.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1257837/Straws-Suck-ACTsmart-campaign.pdf)
  - Poster on [levels of government in the ACT](#)  
([https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/1457740/Poster-F-Australian-Levels-of-Government.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1457740/Poster-F-Australian-Levels-of-Government.pdf))
  - Link to video of students participating in an MPI discussion conducted in the Assembly chamber <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT7xT0q6yQo&feature=youtu.be>
- Resource 1—Excerpts from Hansard for MPI discussion on single use plastic (18 Sept 2018)
- Resource 2—MPI role play teacher information
- Resource 3—MPI role play script

## AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

The role of local government and the decisions it makes on behalf of the community ([ACHASSK091](#))

- exploring what local government does, including the services it provides (for example, environment and waste, libraries, health, parks, cultural events, pools and sport, arts and pet management); and
- describing how local government services impact on the lives of students

## LESSON ORIENTATION

Focus for the lesson is looking at how community concerns are addressed by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) as a Matter of Public Importance (MPI). Single use plastics and the “Straws Suck” campaign will be used as a case study. Students will also explore the role of local government in the ACT.

Look at the links below to introduce students to the ACTsmart “Straws Suck” campaign.

- <https://www.actsmart.act.gov.au/what-can-i-do/business/straws-suck>
- [https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/1257837/Straws-Suck-ACTsmart-campaign.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1257837/Straws-Suck-ACTsmart-campaign.pdf)

## LESSON BODY

### Class discussion

Ask students:

- their thoughts on why banning single use plastic and plastic straws is an important issue;
- how this issue may have become an ACT government campaign (what could have initiated this concern about single use plastic and plastic straws?); and
- what other places in the world are banning single use plastic and plastic straws? (Seattle was the first US city to ban plastic straws and single use plastic utensils and California the first state to ban plastic straws).

Look at the poster on levels of government (Resource link

[https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/1457740/Poster-F-Australian-Levels-of-Government.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1457740/Poster-F-Australian-Levels-of-Government.pdf)). Ask students what area of government services the issue of single use plastic may belong (environment and waste).

Could this issue cross over into other government services (health—straws for people with a disability)

## Matter of Public Importance (MPI) role play—Teacher information.

Any member of the Legislative Assembly may propose a matter of public importance (MPI) to the Assembly for discussion. MPIs usually address an issue that is considered to be of relevance or concern to the ACT community.

The Speaker selects the MPI for the day by drawing a topic from a hat at the beginning of a sitting day. The MPI discussion occurs on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons in sitting weeks after question time and the presentation of papers.

All members have the option to speak on an MPI. Members of the opposition or crossbench will often raise an MPI to question the government's performance and hold it to account. Similarly, government members will raise MPIs to highlight government achievements.

In small groups have students read the selected excerpts (resource 1) from Hansard about single use plastics and plastic straws (*Full debate—Legislative Assembly for the ACT: 2018 Week 10 Hansard (18 September)* <http://www.hansard.act.gov.au/hansard/2018/pdfs/20180918.pdf>). The MPI raised by Ms Le Couteur will give students the opportunity to see how discussion in the Assembly raises issues that ultimately help lead to balanced decision making.

After reading the excerpts have a class discussion. Talk to the students about the viewpoints of each member and how issues need to be discussed to ensure all perspectives and voices are heard.

### Class MPI role-play

*(please note the option of an excursion to the Legislative Assembly to conduct a class MPI in the Assembly chamber)*

Before conducting a class MPI have the students watch the video link below (Resource 4). The video shows students attending a theatre production of *Mr Stink* and discussing the issue of homelessness. Students then attended the ACT Legislative Assembly to participate in an MPI in the Assembly chamber. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT7xT0q6yQo&feature=youtu.be>

Divide the class into 3 groups (these could reflect the 3 parties in the Assembly, groups do not need to be even), each group to discuss and decide on a topic they would like to discuss as an MPI in the role play. Each topic is one sentence beginning "The importance of.....", for example Ms Le Couteur's MPI was "The importance of reducing single-use plastic in the ACT". Once each group has decided a topic they write it down on a piece of paper ready to be placed in a hat for a draw. Each group must also decide who the first person to speak is and write this name on the piece of paper also. Once the 3 topics are in the hat it is ready to be drawn.

The classroom should now be set up as a parliamentary chamber (or an alternative space), see teachers MPI script (resource 2) for information on how to do this. Student roles will need to be allocated including Speaker, government, opposition and cross bench (these could be 3 groups deciding MPI). Once a Speaker has been chosen (this could be done via a vote) they will draw the MPI out of the hat. The topic chosen becomes the issue for discussion, the student nominated to speak on the piece of paper will open the debate.

Students all move to their places in the parliament, allow all students 5 minutes to write a sentence or two on the selected topic before commencing the role play, they will be able to use this during the discussion.

Using the MPI student script conduct the MPI role-play (resource 3)

## **LESSON REFLECTION**

Ask students to reflect on why discussing matters of public importance is a necessary part of government in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

# Resource 1—Excerpts from Hansard

## Excerpt 1

### **Matter of Public Importance discussion—Single-use plastic.**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I have received letters from Ms Cheyne, Ms Cody, Mr Coe, Mrs Dunne, Mr Hanson, Mrs Kikkert, Ms Lawder, Ms Le Couteur, Ms Lee, Ms Orr, Mr Parton and Mr Pettersson proposing that matters of public importance be submitted to the Assembly. In accordance with standing order 79, I have determined that the matter proposed by Ms Le Couteur be submitted to the Assembly for discussion, namely:

The importance of reducing single-use plastic in the ACT.

### **MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee):

We are currently in a global crisis with regard to the environmental and health impacts of plastic pollution, and we need to drastically reduce our single-use plastic consumption. That is why I have called for today's MPI. I am calling for a plastic-free ACT which will see an eventual ban on all single-use plastics.

Worldwide, only 10 to 13 per cent of plastic items are recycled, which is pitifully low. Single-use plastic usually goes into landfill, where it is burned, or gets into our waterways and makes its way to the oceans.

CSIRO research has shown that approximately three-quarters of the rubbish along the Australian coast is plastic. Most of this is from Aussie sources, and the rubbish is near urban areas along our coastline. Despite Australia having some of the greatest natural wonders of the world, we have not looked after them.

This morning while I was working on this, I saw someone walk past my office with a plastic-wrapped carton full of plastic bottles, single-use plastic water bottles. At the Legislative Assembly we should be leading the change. Canberra has totally drinkable water. The Legislative Assembly has an abundance of taps and also an abundance of cups and glasses. The kids in the Actsmart schools' program would be ashamed of what the grown-ups in Canberra are doing.

We are not doing the right thing. We need to support, promote and reward businesses that are doing the right thing.

I am not calling for an immediate complete ban on plastic in the ACT. There are many essential single-use plastic items, in particular in our health system. There are vials, syringes, sample bags, disposable gloves, et cetera. These need to be looked at. And yes, there are people living with disabilities who do need flexible, durable plastic straws in order to drink. But these are things that can be phased out. It may take time, but that time only starts when we start to do it.

## Excerpt 2

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for City Services, Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Roads):

I thank Ms Le Couteur for bringing this matter of public importance before us today in the Assembly. I believe we all have a role to play in reducing single-use plastic in the ACT, and especially the ACT government.

This year we introduced a "straws suck" campaign, which aims to help break our plastic straw habit, while recognising that there are some in our community who still need straws for medical reasons. Within the territory government, we are looking at ways to reduce our own single-use plastic waste. I welcome today's opportunity to speak on the importance of reducing single-use plastic in the ACT and to outline the actions the ACT government is undertaking towards achieving this reduction.

### **Excerpt 3**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong):

No-one will argue that reducing the use of single-use plastic straws will not be a good thing for everyone. However, as shadow minister for disability, I am concerned that a straight-out ban will unfairly impact Canberrans with a disability. There are people in our community who rely on sturdy plastic straws to undertake the act of taking a drink, an activity that most Canberrans take for granted. Before the government charges off to issue a blanket ban on plastic straws there needs to be a thorough consultation into any unintended consequences of the abolition of plastic straws.

Many people who have difficulty swallowing or who have limited hand movements need to use straws and other utensils to eat and drink. They are also helpful tools to exercise the lungs. And single-use straws are cheap, flexible and available. Other options like glass or metal straws are not as flexible and are difficult to clean, leading to concerns about hygiene. Cardboard straws disintegrate in hot liquids or turn into mush after prolonged use.

I was going to thank Ms Le Couteur for her very careful choice of words that the outright ban on straws and other single-use plastics would be discriminatory, yet that reduced use of single-use plastics is something that we can all work towards.

### **Excerpt 4**

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong—Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety and Minister for Mental Health):

I thank Ms Le Couteur for raising this very important topic.

When it comes to actions the government has taken aside from the plastic bag ban, I was pleased, as the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, to launch the "straws suck" campaign, which Mr Steel referred to. The campaign aims to encourage businesses and the community to avoid unnecessary plastic waste by rethinking their need for single-use plastic straws. It is a campaign that is being delivered by Actsmart in the ACT government. It asks local businesses to take a pledge to reduce the number of single-use straws being used. I am pleased to report that almost 30 businesses have already signed up to the campaign. Community members can support this campaign by saying no to plastic straws when offered one and asking their local cafe or pub to consider signing the pledge. Individuals can also sign up to this pledge as part of the Actsmart online carbon challenge.

It may seem like saying no to plastic straws is a small act but the impacts do really add up. An estimated 10 million plastic straws are used in Australia every single day: not every year; every single day. This is an extraordinary figure. Each of these straws takes up to 200 years to degrade in the environment and they never biodegrade.

Plastic straws are in the top 10 most littered items globally. A plastic straw used today will outlive your children's children's children. The thing with a plastic straw is that we use it for a few minutes, maybe half an hour at the most, but it will result in very long-lived plastic waste in our environment. Most of us have perfectly good lips from which we can consume that drink ourselves.

As Mr Steel touched on in his remarks, there are some people who, for perhaps a medical reason or whatever, might need to use a straw. We have a duty there to make sure alternatives are available, whether it is a bamboo straw or a stainless steel one.

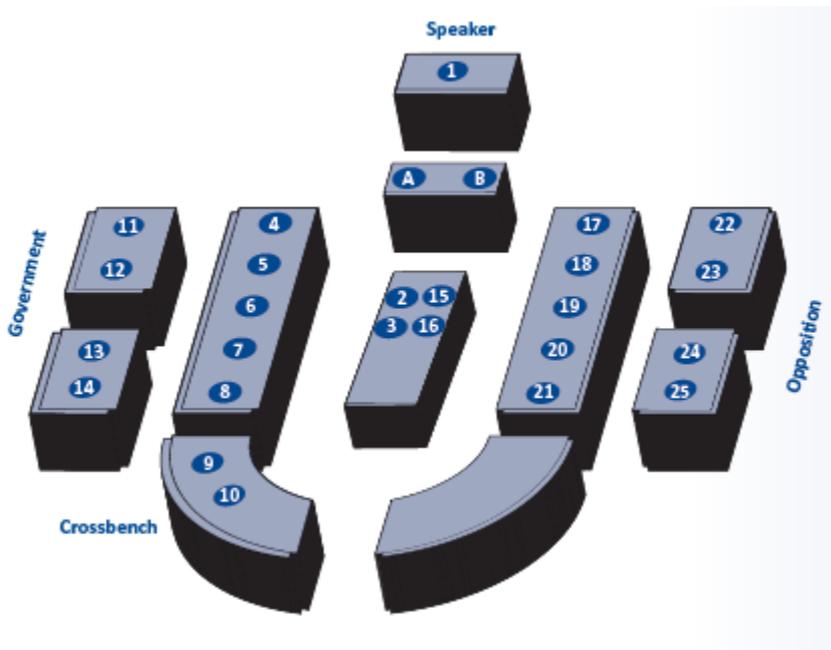
There is a role for both state and territory governments and the federal government here. One thing we can do as a territory is take the initiatives we can take and seek to demonstrate good examples that both do our part here in the ACT and show to others what is possible. I commend Ms Le Couteur for raising this matter of public importance today.

*Discussion concluded.*

# Resource 2—MPI teacher notes

## Legislative Assembly for the ACT

### Chamber setup



### Key

1. Speaker

A-B. Clerk, Deputy Clerk/Serjeant-at-Arms

2-3. Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister

4-8. Ministers

9-10. Crossbench

11-14. Government backbenchers

15-16. Opposition Leader, Deputy Opposition Leader

17-25. Opposition members

The Legislative Assembly for the ACT has 25 members. There are five multi-member electorates in the ACT, each electorate is represented by five Members. Party representation in the Ninth Assembly is:

- 12 Australian Labor— Party Members
- 11 Canberra Liberal Members
- 2 ACT Greens Members

For the purposes of this role play to reflect the minority Government of the Ninth Assembly students should be divided so that there is 1 Speaker (who is also a member of the Government), 2 Clerks (who are not members), the Government has one Member less than a majority, the Cross Bench should have a minimum 2 members with the Opposition being formed from the remaining students. As an example for a class of 29 students they could be split as follows:

- 1 Speaker (also a government member)
- 1 Clerk and 1 Deputy Clerk (parliamentary roles, not members)
- 12 government members (includes Speaker), 11 opposition members and 4 cross bench members

This represents a 27 Member Assembly (Clerk positions are not members) and allows the Cross bench to hold the balance of power so they can vote with either side (depending on their decision) to pass a bill with a majority vote which in this example is 14 Members.

## Roles

### The Speaker

The Speaker is an elected Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). They are elected to the position of Speaker on the first sitting day of a new Assembly. The Speaker controls the proceedings in the Assembly and is responsible for ensuring that members follow the 280 standing orders (rules) that govern the operation of the Assembly.

Any members wanting to speak during debate must stand up and say “Mr/Madam Speaker” and the Speaker will call on them. Members who are speaking must address the Speaker, not other members. To maintain order, if more than one member is talking at the same time, the Speaker will often say “order members”.

### Clerks

There is a Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Clerk Assistant in the Legislative Assembly, they work for the Assembly and are not elected. They know all the standing orders and provide advice to the Speaker on sitting days to help them enforce the standing orders. They also provide independent and impartial parliamentary advice to the Speaker and Members of the Assembly.

The clerks are experts on procedure and keep the official record of sitting days, announce each order of business, time debates, ring division bells and count the votes.

### Serjeant-At-Arms

The Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is also the Serjeant-at-Arms.

The Serjeant-at-Arms announces the Speaker, carries the mace in at the start of a sitting day and places it on the stand. Under the Speaker’s direction they are sometimes required to escort members from the chamber who have been acting in a disorderly manner.

## Chief Minister

The Chief Minister is the head of the government, the party with the largest number of members in the Assembly usually forms government.

The Chief Minister can appoint up to eight members to be ministers (they are known as the executive).

For the purposes of this role play the government is in favour of the bill. Government ministers and back bench members wishing to speak need to think of reasons for supporting this bill.

## Leader of the Opposition

The Leader of the Opposition is the head of the party that forms opposition, this is usually the party with the second largest number of members in the Assembly.

The role of the opposition is to scrutinize the government and opposition members are shadow ministers as they reflect (shadow) the portfolios of the government ministers.

The opposition party does not always oppose government bills, sometimes it agrees with the government to help pass legislation in the Assembly.

For the purposes of this role play the opposition is against the bill, members of the opposition need to think of reasons against the bill.

## Cross Bench

The members on the crossbench are made up of minor party members and independents who do not belong to the major parties that formed the government and the opposition.

Cross bench members hold the balance of power when there is a minority government. The ACT has only had one majority Government since self-government began in 1989.

For the purposes of this role play the cross-bench members need to decide their position and think of reasons either for or against the bill depending on their decision, as they will hold the balance of power on this bill.

## Chamber

Members usually show support for speeches that they agree with by saying "Hear Hear"

Members often show their opposition to speeches by saying such things as "No", or "Rubbish".

## Matter of Public Importance—Topic examples

Note: Only 3 topics are needed for the role play. Below are some suggestions you can choose, or you can design your own MPI's to discuss based on class/school interest:

The importance of recycling single use plastic in the ACT.

Submitted by:.....

The importance of banning all single use plastic bags in the ACT.

Submitted by:.....

The importance of reducing plastic straw use in the ACT.

Submitted by:.....

## Resource 3—MPI role play script

**Explanatory notes:** Every sitting day of the Assembly opens with the Serjeant-at-Arms (who is also the Deputy Clerk) leads the Speaker into the chamber and announces them. All members will already be present in the chamber and stand as the Speaker enters. All members remain standing until after the acknowledgement and reflection. Every member can only speak once during the discussion.

(All members stand).

(Serjeant-at-Arms and Speaker enter the Assembly chamber. If a mace has been made, the Serjeant-at-Arms carries this).

### Serjeant-at-Arms: Members, the Speaker

(Speaker and Serjeant-at-Arms stand at their chairs).

**Speaker:** At the beginning of this session of the Assembly I acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of the Ngunnawal people, the traditional owners. I respect their continuing culture and the unique contribution they make to the life of this area. Members, I would ask you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

(Speaker sits after 5 seconds silence, all members and Clerks sit).

**Speaker:** I have received letters from \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ proposing that  
matters of public importance be submitted to the Assembly.  
In accordance with standing order 79, I have determined that  
the matter proposed by \_\_\_\_\_ be submitted,  
“The importance of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_”

Speaker: I call Mr/Miss [surname] to speak

(Member whose MPI topic was drawn from the hat stands to speak).

Member: Thank you Mr/Madam Speaker (*insert speech written during time provided earlier in the lesson*)

(Member sits).

**REPEAT THE FOLLOWING PROCESS**—until time expires or all members who wish to speak have spoken. [*suggested total time 5-15 minutes*]

(Other members—Stand if you wish to speak to this debate, wait for the Speakers call).

Speaker: I call Mr/Miss [surname] to speak

(If the Speaker selects you by saying your name stay standing for your speech, members not selected sit).

Member: Thank you Mr/Madam Speaker (*insert prepared speech*)

(Member sits).

(REPEAT until all members have had a chance to contribute to the discussion).

Speaker: The time for the MPI has expired. It is my understanding that the Assembly wishes to adjourn. The chair will be resumed at the next sitting.

(Members can leave the chamber).