

Report of the Victorian Branch on Aspects of the Victorian Parliament since the 2006 election

Judy Maddigan and Sarah Hyslop*

Following the state election in November 2006 the Labor Government was returned to office. This was the first election following the legislative changes made to the Council by the *Constitution (Amendment) Act* passed in the 55th Parliament.

In this Parliament there are 38 female and 90 male members. The Upper House was reduced from 44 seats to 40 seats with five members representing each of the eight Regions.

Legislative Council

As a result of constitutional changes to the Legislative Council, minor parties were elected for the first time, with the result being

Government 19
Liberal Party 15
Nationals 2
Australian Greens 3
Democratic Labor Party 1

For the first time, Upper House members elected at the 2006 election no longer attract the 'Honourable' title.

As a result of the new structure of the Chamber a number of Upper House Committees have been established to examine Government policy on gaming licence tender process; public land policy; and business case for bay dredging.

* Judy Maddigan, MP, Chair Rights and Crime Prevention Committee, Member for Essendon, Victoria; Sarah Hyslop, Department of the Legislative Council, Parliament of Victoria.

Legislative Assembly

For the first time in an Australian Parliament the Premier introduced a 'Statement of Intent'. This is based on the British model and outlines the legislative programme for the year.

For the first time in Victoria the Treasurer John Lenders is a Member of the Legislative Council, yet delivered the Budget in the Assembly. The procedure adopted to allow this to happen was based on the New South Wales model. There was some concern from the Opposition that the Treasurer would not be in the Assembly to hear its budget response.

Conscience Votes

This year there will be two bills before the House which will have a conscience vote.

The Government will introduce a bill to decriminalise abortion most probably in September, and a private member's bill has been introduced by an Australian Green's member in the Council supporting euthanasia.

Parliamentary Sittings

In August Parliament will be on-line for the first time, following funding in the 2007/2008 Budget.

The Parliament will be holding regional sittings in October this year. The Assembly will sit in Churchill for one day and the Council in Lakes Entrance for two days.

The last regional sittings were in November 2005 which were held in Geelong and Colac.

Women's Suffrage

This year is the centenary of women getting the vote in Victoria. The bill (after many unsuccessful attempts) finally passed the Legislative Council in November 1908. Victoria was the last Australian state to grant women the vote. (Women did not get the right to stand for Parliament until 1923.)

The Government has allocated funding for a number of community activities celebrating the centenary of women's suffrage that will conclude with functions at the Parliament in November this year. ▲