Ministers as private Members: Constituency representation in the Federation Chamber

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Abstract: All parliaments in Australia and New Zealand provide regular opportunities for Members to make statements about general matters of interest or concern affecting their constituencies. However, many jurisdictions restrict Ministers' participation in these items of business, reflecting concerns about the potential misuse of time intended for private Members. This article compares these practices and examines in depth a unique period of statements which has been progressively expanded to include Ministers: Members' three minute constituency statements in the Federation Chamber of the Australian House of Representatives. Drawing on participation data from the 42nd to 47th Parliaments and applying the Representational Connections Framework to statements made during 2024, this article demonstrates that recent increases in Ministers' participation in constituency statements are in proportion with their membership of the House and reflect a genuine intent to represent and connect with constituents. These findings challenge assumptions about executive encroachment into private Members' business and underscore the importance of the representative role played by all Members of Parliament.

The role of an elected member of parliament is first and foremost to represent their constituents and the values of their electorate. Constituency statements … are an important part of our democracy because they allow elected representatives to highlight their local community in the halls of power, bringing issues of local importance to national attention.—The Hon Ged Kearney MP[1]

The purpose of [constituency] statements is to allow members of the House to report on and raise issues of importance to their constituencies. This

[1] G. Kearney, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates,* House of Representatives, 29 May 2024, pp. 3239-3240.

> *should extend to all members of the House, as all represent areas that require such attention.*—The Hon Anthony Albanese MP[2]

INTRODUCTION

The 47th Parliament saw a marked increase in Ministers' participation in Members' three minute constituency statements in the Federation Chamber, the secondary debating chamber of the Australian House of Representatives. The standing orders of many parliaments in Australia and New Zealand restrict Ministers from participating, either procedurally or in practice, in certain items of business regarded as the purview of the private Member.[3] The House of Representatives, which still restricts Ministers' participation in a range of opportunities for private Members, removed the last restrictions on constituency statements more than 17 years ago in recognition that all Members of the House, Ministers included, have a role in representing their constituencies. In this article, I seek to understand the recent increase in, and potential implications of, Ministers' participation in constituency statements in the Federation Chamber by exploring the rate of all Members' participation over the previous six parliaments. Then, using a recognised framework of constituency representation styles, I analyse the ways in which constituency statements are used by Members to show connection to their constituents and demonstrate that Ministers are using this opportunity genuinely, and consistent with its intended purpose, to make statements relating to and on behalf of their constituents.

MINISTERS' PARTICIPATION IN PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS AND DEBATE

The ability of Ministers, including Assistant Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, to participate in non-government, private Members' or Members' business, in particular the regular periods for statements and debate on general matters affecting their constituencies, varies between jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand.[4] The procedural rights of Ministers

[2] A. Albanese, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates,* House of Representatives, 24 June 2008, pp. 5790-5791.

[3] That is, not a government Minister or presiding officer. See, David Elder (ed), *House of Representatives Practice*, 7th edn. Canberra: Department of the House of Representatives, 2018, pp. 133, 577; Parliament of New South Wales, 'Private Members', *Parliamentary Education and Engagement*. Accessed at https://education.parliament.nsw.gov.au/glossary-term/private-members/.

[4] In the ACT, another category of 'crossbench executive members' business' has been used to address the complexities of a coalition agreement/minority government and allow business from a crossbench Minister, not supported by the majority governing party. See David Skinner and Tom Duncan (eds), *Companion to the Standing*

to initiate and determine government business do not extend to these periods, which are intended to provide a routine avenue for one of the core functions of parliament: allowing Members to represent the concerns and ventilate the grievances of their constituents.[5] Some parliaments go as far as to restrict the participation of Ministers, either through standing orders or practice, in ways that suggest two implicit concerns: first, that Ministers' participation may unfairly take time from private Members, who have fewer opportunities to address the parliament; and second, that Ministers may abuse these items of business to make statements in their capacity as a representative of the government, rather than in their capacity as representative of their constituents.

Every house of parliament in Australia and New Zealand provides in its order of business at least one regularly scheduled opportunity for Members to make statements on general matters of concern or interest; Table 1 outlines these items of business, including restrictions on Ministers' participation, as set out in standing and sessional orders. Most jurisdictions also allow debate on a broad range of matters during Address In Reply debates, although these are generally limited to the start of a parliamentary term so are not counted as a regular opportunity for the purpose of this article. Many also hold debates on matters of public importance, interest, urgency or similar, but as these debates are constrained to a topic proposed on the day and do not allow for general matters to be raised, they have also been excluded from this article.

Almost all jurisdictions have a regular period for miscellaneous statements by Members, between 90 seconds and ten minutes in length, without a specific question before the House. These are generally referred to as Members' (or Senators') statements or private Members' statements, although some periods are named specifically for their purpose, such as constituency statements, community recognition statements or statements on matters of interest. The first of these was established in the Australian House of Representatives in the late 1980s, based on a model from Canada, following concerns that 'the balance [was] being increasingly tilted away from a reasonable share of the House's time for private Members'.[6]

Orders of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, 2nd edn. Canberra: Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, 2022, pp. 202, 275-276.

[5] *House of Representatives Practice*, p. 41; *The Queensland Parliamentary Procedures Handbook*. Brisbane: Queensland Parliament, 2024, p. 3; David Wilson (ed), *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, 5th edn. Wellington, 2023, pp. 48-49.

[6] Members' 90 second statements, standing order 43. Commonwealth, *Votes and Proceedings*, No. 44, 17 March 1988, pp. 411-414; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Alternative opportunities for Members to concisely address the House*. Canberra, 1985, pp. 6-9.

The standing orders of several chambers, including the House of Representatives, explicitly bar Ministers and/or Assistant Ministers from participating in some of these periods for Members' statements.[7] Others place restrictions on Ministers through practice, permitting them to participate only in their capacity as a private Member if their statements do not raise policy issues falling within their portfolio responsibilities.[8] Periods of statements may also be expressly limited to constituency matters or community recognition, having the effect of preventing any Member from using those statements for another purpose.[9]

Table 1. Opportunities for Members' statements on general matters of concern (as at 1 August 2025)

Parliament	Members' statements	Adjournment debate[10]	Grievance debate[11]	Standing orders relating to Ministers' participation
Australian Senate	Senators' statements – 2 or 10 mins (SO 57)	Yes – 5 or 10 mins (SO 54)	No	None
Australian House of Representatives	Members' statements – 90 sec (SO 43); Constituency statements – 3 mins (SO 193)	Yes – 5 mins (SOs 1, 31, 191)	Yes – 10 mins (SOs 1, 192B)	SOs 31 and 91 (powers to control adjournment debate, including ability to extend debate to make reply); SO 43 (barring Ministers, including Parliamentary Secretaries, from participating in Members' statements)

[7] Australian House of Representatives, South Australian House of Assembly and Western Australian Legislative Assembly.

[8] Legislative Assembly, *Guide to Chamber Procedure*, Parliament of New South Wales, Sydney, May 2023, pp. 50-51; *New South Wales Legislative Assembly Practice, Procedure and Privilege*, Online Ed, 2013, Chapter 12, p. 16. Accessed at: www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/la/proceduralpublications/Pages/wppbook.aspx.

[9] Legislative Assembly, *Guide to Chamber Procedure*, pp. 50-51.

[10] Debate on the question 'That the [House] do now adjourn' or similar.

[11] Debate on the question 'That grievances be noted' or similar.

New Zealand House of Representatives	General debate[12] – 5 minutes (SO 402)	No	No	None
ACT Legislative Assembly	Member Statements – 90 sec (SO 33A)	Yes – 5 mins (SOs 34, 69)	No	SOs 34 and 35 (powers to control adjournment debate)
Northern Territory Legislative Assembly	No	Yes – 10 mins (SO 43)	No	None
Queensland Legislative Assembly	Private Members' Statements – 3 mins (Sessional order 1)	Yes – 3 mins (SO 56, sessional order 1)	No	None
New South Wales Legislative Council	Members' Statements – 3 mins (SO 43)	Yes – 5 mins (SO 33)	No	SO 33 (adjournment question put at conclusion of the Minister's remarks)
New South Wales Legislative Assembly	Private Members' Statements – 5 mins (SO 108); Community Recognition Statements – 1 min (SO 108A)	No	No	SO 108 (allowance for 1 min replies by Ministers during the period)
Victorian Legislative Council	Members' statements – 90 sec (SOs 5.03, 5.13)	Yes – 3 mins (SOs 4.11, 5.03)	No	SOs 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14 (adjournment debate is for Members to raise matters for consideration by Ministers, provisions for reply by Ministers in debate or in writing)

[12] Debate on the question 'That the House take note of miscellaneous business'.

Victorian Legislative Assembly	Statements by Members – 90 sec (SO 40)	Yes – 3 mins (SO 33)	Yes - 15 mins (SO 38)	SO 33 (adjournment debate provisions for reply by Ministers in debate or in writing)
Tasmanian Legislative Council	Special Interest Matters – 5 mins (SO 39, sessional order 4)	Yes – time not specified in standing orders	No	None
Tasmanian House of Assembly	No	Yes – 5 mins (SO 18, sessional order reduces time from 7 mins)	No	None
South Australian Legislative Council	Statements on matters of interest – 5 mins (SO67b)	No	No	None
South Australian House of Assembly	Private Members' Statements – 90 sec (Sessional order 6)	Yes – 10 mins (SO 49)	Yes – 5 mins (SO 81A)	Sessional order 6 (barring Ministers from making Private Members' Statements but allowing Parliamentary Secretaries to do so)
Western Australian Legislative Council	Members' Statements – 10 mins (SOs 15, 21)	No	No	None
Western Australian Legislative Assembly	Members' Statements – 90 sec (SOs 101, 147)	No	Yes – 7 mins (SOs 102, 146)	SO 146 (provisions for Minister to reply to grievances); SO 147 (barring Ministers from making Members' Statements)

One of the longest-standing opportunities for Members to raise matters of concern in parliament is the grievance debate, derived from the centuries-old financial procedures of the UK House of Commons where grievances were considered before granting supply to the

Crown.[13] In the four jurisdictions which currently hold a grievance debate, Members speak to the question 'that grievances be noted' or similar, making a statement of between five and 15 minutes in length on a matter of concern or interest (not necessarily a 'grievance' in the ordinary sense of the word).[14] Ministers' participation in these grievance debates is rare, but is not explicitly restricted by standing orders; it is possible that this is due to the debate's origins as an avenue for criticism of administrative policy. In the Australian House of Representatives, it has been traditional practice that Ministers do not participate in the grievance debate to allow private Members the opportunity to speak,[15] and this remains the case even as practice has shifted in other periods of statements.

Another common, regular opportunity for statements on general matters is the adjournment debate. In most jurisdictions, Members speak to the question 'that the House do now adjourn' or similar, each making statements of generally three, five or ten minutes in length on any matter of interest, and the House is adjourned at the conclusion of these statements.[16] In some jurisdictions, the Chair may give the call to other Members in preference over Ministers.[17] In others, Ministers are formally restricted to speaking only in reply to other Members18 or limited to speaking last, as their contribution may close the debate unless they are considered to be speaking in their capacity as a private Member.[19] In the House of Representatives in the Parliament of Australia, which has both the long-standing practice of giving the call to other Members ahead of Ministers and standing orders for Ministerial replies and control of debate,

[13] *House of Representatives Practice*, pp. 586. The historical role of the UK Parliament in redressing grievances is also considered in Donald D Searing, 'The Role of the Good Constituency Member and the Practice of Representation in Great Britain'. *Journal of Politics*, 47(2), 1985, p. 50.

[14] Australian House of Representatives, Victorian Legislative Assembly, South Australian House of Assembly and Western Australian Legislative Assembly. See Table 1.

[15] *House of Representatives Practice*, pp. 586-587. For a more comprehensive history of the debate, see J. A. Pettifer (ed), *House of Representatives Practice*, 1st edn. Canberra, 1981, p. 525.

[16] Although there is no debate on the question of adjournment in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, the Assembly adjourns without motion after its period of Private Members' Statements, which may be considered a quasi-adjournment debate.

[17] *Companion to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory*, p. 252; *House of Representatives Practice*, p. 590.

[18] Victorian Legislative Council and Victorian Legislative Assembly. See Table 1.

[19] Stephen Frappell and David Blunt (eds), *New South Wales Legislative Council Practice*, 2nd edn. Sydney: The Federation Press, 2021, p. 390. See also, *Companion to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory*, p. 252.

it is becoming increasingly common for Ministers to participate in their private capacity and, on occasion, receive the call ahead of private Members.[20]

New Zealand's House of Representatives has a unique item of business for regularly scheduled Members' statements, more alike in form to grievance and adjournment debates. The general debate, which occurs on most sitting Wednesdays, is held on the question 'That the House take note of miscellaneous business' and allows members to make statements of up to 5 minutes in length on any matter of interest or concern. The participation of Ministers in the general debate is expressly provided for through their inclusion in the party proportions when calculating the roster for allocation of the call, unlike other items of business which are also subject to roster.[21]

While some jurisdictions do actively provide for Ministers' participation in these opportunities for Members' statements on general matters, implicit in the restrictions described above is an overall concern about the encroachment of Ministers into the realm of the private Member. This concern may be connected to broader tensions observed about the increasing size of executive governments and their impact on the work of a parliament,[22] a consideration which was articulated when Members' statements were first introduced in the House of Representatives in the Parliament of Australia.[23] Members' three minute constituency statements in the Federation Chamber of the House of Representatives is unique in being the only period of statements which appears to have been specifically expanded over time to encourage the participation of Ministers and Assistant Ministers. However, as I demonstrate below, the uptake of this opportunity, particularly by Ministers, was limited until the 47th Parliament.

[20] For example, J. Elliot, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 22 August 2024, p. 6196. See also, *House of Representatives Practice*, pp. 588, 590.

[21] *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, p. 265.

[22] For example, Scott Prasser, 'Executive growth and the takeover of Australian parliaments', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, 27(1), pp. 48-61.

[23] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Alternative opportunities for Members to concisely address the House*. Canberra, 1985, pp. 6-9.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS IN THE FEDERATION CHAMBER

The Federation Chamber is the second debating chamber of the Australian House of Representatives. First established in 1994 as the Main Committee, its original purpose was to reduce pressure on the House by providing an additional venue for debate on legislation. As outlined by Cooke in her retrospective of the first 30 years of the Federation Chamber, the role of the chamber has expanded over time to provide a venue for a range of both government and non-government business items, increasing the opportunities for members to fulfil their role as representatives of their constituencies.[24] Although there are sometimes differing views between the major parties about the best use of the Federation Chamber, there is an ongoing and widespread support for its role as an avenue for constituency representation.[25]

Constituency statements in the Federation Chamber allow Ministers to take part in a category of business from which they are typically excluded in practice.[26] In the Australian House of Representatives, Ministers may not sponsor items of private Members' business. Their participation is rare during debate of private Members' bills and motions[27] and generally infrequent in the periods of statements, described in the section above, which are deemed 'other opportunities for private Members'.[28] In contrast, constituency statements are expected to be made by Ministers; constituency statements were first introduced in 1998 and later expanded to specifically include participation by Parliamentary Secretaries in 1999 and Ministers in 2008.[29] These expansions were made in recognition that a constituency representative role is one held by all Members of the House, not just private Members.[30]

[24] Natalie Cooke, 'The Federation Chamber at 30: From Main Committee to much more'. *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, 39(2) 2024, pp. 53.

[25] See, for example, K. Hogan, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 23 July 2025, p. 86; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Maintenance of the standing and sessional orders.* Canberra, November 2024, pp. 21-22.

[26] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Role of the Federation Chamber: Celebrating 20 years of operation*. Canberra, June 2015, pp. vi, 12.

[27] Not including motions to suspend standing orders, or other private Members' motions not moved during Private Members' Business.

[28] *House of Representatives Practice*, p. 573, 577.

[29] Cooke, *The Federation Chamber at 30*, pp. 54-55.

[30] A. Albanese, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates,* House of Representatives, 24 June 2008, pp. 5790-5791; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Role of the Federation Chamber: Celebrating 20 years of operation*. Canberra, June 2015, p. 12.

The period for constituency statements occurs on each day that the Federation Chamber meets, allowing either 30 or 60 minutes of three-minute statements irrespective of interruption for divisions in the House.[31] As is usual practice in the House and Federation Chamber, allocation of the call alternates between government and non-government Members. Unlike the adjournment debate, there is no practice of giving priority to other Members over Ministers during constituency statements, so Ministers may rise to seek the call for the government side in any order. The changing size of the crossbench has also had an influence on practice in allocation of the call during constituency statements over time. For example, crossbench Members were allocated the call with the government side in the minority 43rd Parliament,[32] although the procedure was not formalised in standing or sessional orders.[33] In the 47th Parliament, a new sessional order was adopted to support participation of the large crossbench across a range of items of business[34] and provided for priority of the call in constituency statements for at least one crossbench Member on the non-government side each day.[35]

While these small changes in practice shaped overall participation patterns in constituency statements over the past six parliaments, they do not account for the changing pattern of Ministers' participation over time. Figure 1 sets out the overall participation of all Members in constituency statements from the 42nd Parliament to the 47th Parliament, by the following categories: Government Frontbench (that is, Ministers and Assistant Ministers), Government Backbench, Opposition and Crossbench.

[31] Standing order 193. The period has also been extended at times by agreement; see *House of Representatives Practice*, p. 588.

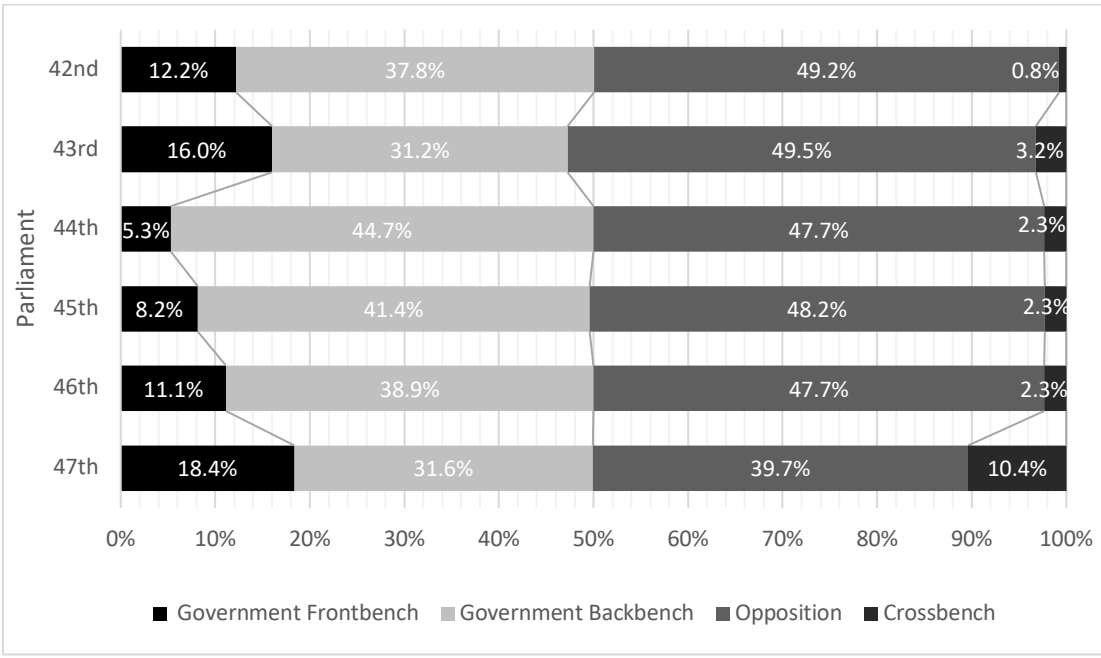
[32] One crossbench member was given the call with the government side on Wednesdays only.

[33] This contrasts with other arrangements during the period, which were proposed in the *Agreement for a Better Parliament: Parliamentary Reform* at the time. See House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Interim Report: Monitoring and review of procedural changes implemented in the 43rd Parliament*. Canberra, April 2011, p. 26.

[34] Sessional order 65A. See also, Miriam Berger, 'Beyond the Bench: Crossbench influence on a contemporary House of Representatives'. *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, 39(2) 2024, pp. 27-39.

[35] Sessional order 65A was again adopted at the start of the 48th Parliament in July 2025, allowing priority for one crossbench Member during 30-minute periods and two crossbench Members during new 60-minute periods of constituency statements, maintaining the proportion of participation from the 47th Parliament.

Figure 1. Percentage of Constituency Statements Made by Member Type, 42nd to 47th Parliaments [36]



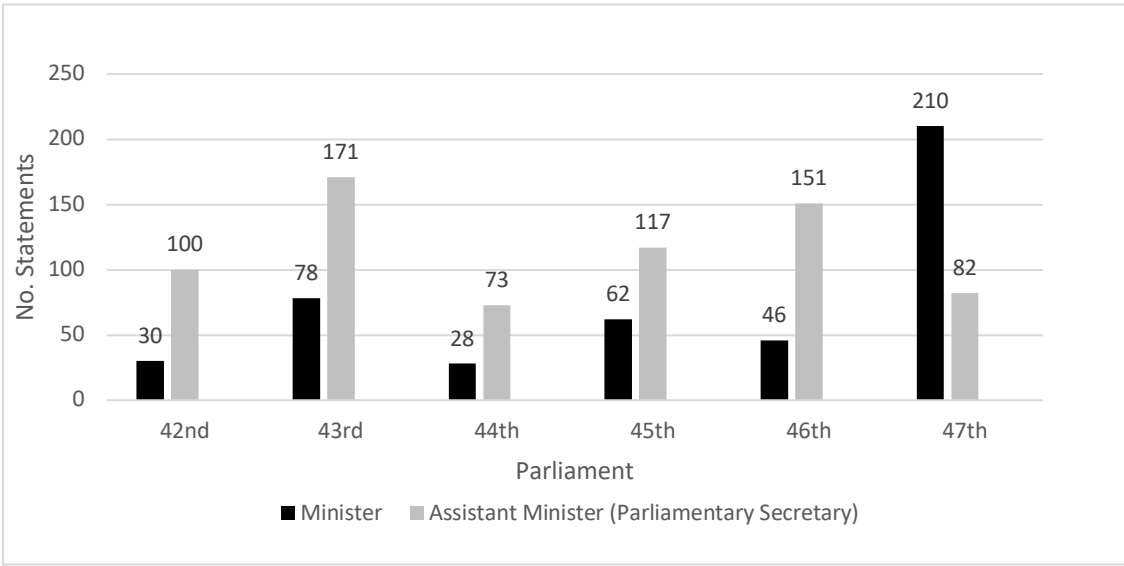
The 47th Parliament had the highest incidence of Ministerial participation in constituency statements to date, with 18.4 per cent of all statements made by the government frontbench, while the lowest level of participation was during the 44th Parliament, with only 5.3 per cent of statements. There appears to be a difference in participation rates based on political party, with the overall average participation level of Ministers during parliaments with Labor Governments (42nd, 43rd and 47th Parliaments) at 15.5 per cent, almost double that of Coalition Governments (44th, 45th and 46th Parliaments) at 8.2 per cent. Ministerial representation in the House of Representatives has remained relatively static over that time,[37] so it is possible that the difference is indicative of differing attitudes between the major parties towards this period of statements and the profile of the Federation Chamber more broadly. This could be a topic for further qualitative study.

[36] *House of Representatives Procedure Office;* Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 2008-2025.

[37] Parliamentary Library, 'Ministries', *Australian Parliamentary Library Handbook Online*. Accessed at: https://handbook.aph.gov.au/Ministries.

While overall participation of Ministers and Assistant Ministers as a proportion of all Members has fluctuated, the pattern of their participation was somewhat consistent between the 42nd and 46th Parliaments. Figure 2 sets out the number of constituency statements made by Ministers during the same period as considered above. Until the most recent parliament, the majority of government frontbench statements were made by Assistant Ministers, with Ministers only accounting for around one quarter to one third of statements from the frontbench. This changed drastically in the 47th Parliament, with Ministers making nearly three quarters of frontbench statements.

Figure 2. Constituency Statements by Ministers, 42nd Parliament to 47th Parliament[38]



[38] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 2008-2025.

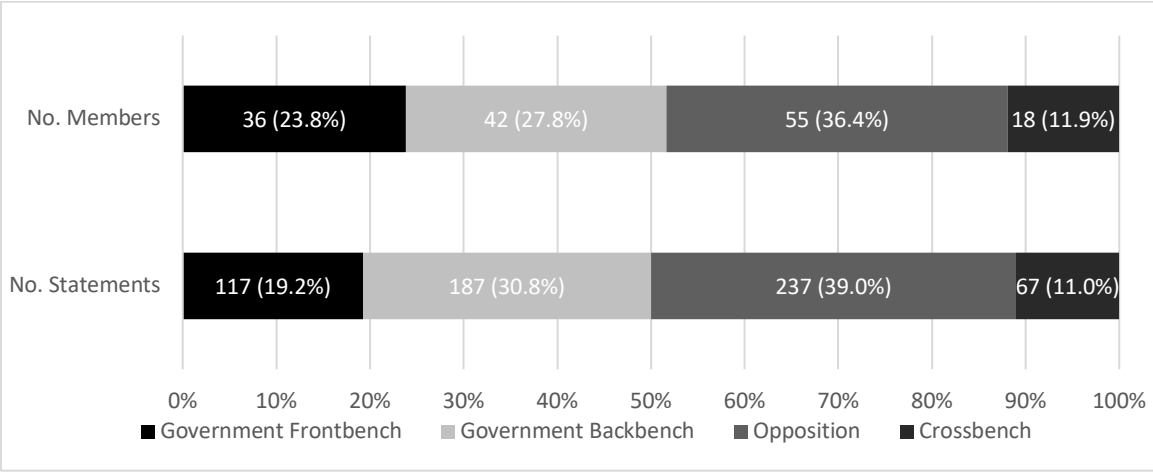
The increase in participation by Ministers, and decrease in participation of Assistant Ministers, has likely been facilitated by an innovation in practice that commenced during the 47th Parliament, whereby the government whips began to set speaking lists for this period in alphabetical order by surname, irrespective of position in the party.[39] For example, on Monday 25 November 2024, government speakers during constituency statements included Assistant Minister Watts, Minister Wells, Mr Wilson, Mr Zappia and Minister Aly.[40] This alphabetical practice also resulted in some days having no Ministers participating in constituency statements, while others had Ministers seeking the call in four of the five government turns. Such days, in isolation, may appear to put government backbenchers at a disadvantage.

With the allocation of the call alternating between government and non-government speakers, the impact of an increase in Ministerial participation across the board has been, necessarily, a reduction in the speaking opportunities for government backbenchers. Figure 3 outlines the number of Members in the House and the number of constituency statements made during the 2024 sitting year, towards the end of the 47th Parliament, grouped by the same Member type categories used in Figure 1. It demonstrates that, even with the increase in Ministerial participation, government backbenchers still accounted for more than their 'fair share' of the call when considering their proportion of membership. Opposition Members were also slightly advantaged by the alternating call arrangements, making up a smaller proportion in the House than in their allocation of the call.

[39] Except for the Prime Minister and the Speaker, and with some flexibility to account for the availability of Members. The practice is also being used to an extent by opposition whips for the non-government speaking list, not including the crossbench.

[40] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 25 November 2024, pp. 8474-8479.

Figure 3. Number of Members and Constituency Statements Made, 2024 Sitting Year[41]



In summary, the overall increase in Ministerial participation in constituency statements during the 47th Parliament can be accounted for by a shift in government whips' practice in scheduling speaking lists for this opportunity. This approach suggests an interest in ensuring that all government Members, including Ministers and Assistant Ministers, are being scheduled and provided reasonable opportunity to make constituency statements. While government backbenchers had fewer speaking slots available to them than in previous years, they still received an allocation of the call greater than their proportion in the House. Because of existing rules around allocation of the call, the increase in Ministerial participation did not have any impact on the participation of non-government Members in this item of business.

In the early days of the 48th Parliament, government whips appear to be continuing the practice of scheduling all Members alphabetically, but it is not yet clear if Ministers will continue to be regularly included in that schedule. It remains to be seen whether this Parliament will see a sustained higher rate of Ministerial participation in constituency statements, or whether Ministers and Assistant Ministers will at some point give over their time to the larger government backbench and return to the participation patterns of earlier years.

[41] *House of Representatives Procedure Office;* Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 2024.

CONSTITUENCY CONNECTION STYLES: HOW DO MINISTERS USE CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS?

While other jurisdictions may restrict the content of Members' statements to require that they relate to specific matters or to prevent Ministers misusing the opportunity for policy statements about their portfolios, the standing orders of the House of Representatives do not define what matters may be raised in a constituency statement.[42] In debate, Members have described the purpose of these statements as intended for Members to speak about, and represent the interests of, constituents.[43] In moving the change to standing orders in 2008 to allow Ministers to participate, the then-Leader of the House, Mr Albanese, described the kinds of matter that 'should not be excluded from representation' by detailing a visit he had made to constituents celebrating a 60th wedding anniversary.[44] While many constituency statements take the form of commemorative or celebratory statements about the community, others are more focused on the impact of government policy, or used as an opportunity for Members to inform the House of advocacy for their constituents or to demonstrate connections with their political party. These broad categories reflect the four styles of constituency representation and relationship-building activities conducted by Members of Parliament as described in Koop, Bastedo and Blidook's Representational Connections Framework.[45] As I am seeking to understand the ways in which Ministers use constituency statements in the Federation Chamber differently to other Members, this model presents a ready classification system for the content of constituency statements made by all Members and the connection styles which they draw upon.

Over the last fifty years, there has been an increasing interest in the constituency role of elected Members in parliamentary democracies[46] and several authors have sought to categorise and analyse the ways in which Members seek to build connections with, and secure the vote of, their constituents. Notably, in the 1970s, Fenno described the behaviour of US

[42] *House of Representatives Practice*, p. 588.

[43] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 4 December 1997, pp. 112029-112037.

[44] A. Albanese, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 24 June 2008, pp. 5790-5791.

[45] Royce Koop, Heather Bastedo and Kelly Blidook, *Representation in Action: Canadian MPs in the Constituencie*s, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2018, p. 19.

[46] See, for example, Philip Norton, 'The Growth of the Constituency Role of the MP'. *Parliamentary Affairs* 47(4), 1994, p. 705-720; Geoff Gallop, 'The role of a Member of Parliament'. *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 24(2), 2009, pp. 2-8.

Congressmen in their electoral districts as their 'home style',[47] while Eulau and Karps first described four possible components of this representational responsiveness towards constituencies.[48] In the 1980s, Searing described types of 'constituency Members' in the UK House of Commons and observed that all Members, including Ministers, participated in 'at least a little constituency service'.[49] In the late 1990s, Zappala noted that this aspect of representational study remained 'sadly neglected' in Australia.[50] More recently, Koop et al, from observations of Canadian Members of Parliament, built upon this literature and created the Representational Connections Framework, a typology of four representational styles to describe the functions and activities performed by Members to build connections with their constituencies outside of the parliament.[51] Petter then applied and expanded upon the model in his study of both the style and intensity of constituency work by Members of the Queensland Parliament during 2019 and 2021.[52]

In brief, the four connection styles of the framework can be defined as:

- Policy Connections: where Members advocate for, or attempt to change the views of, constituents on legislative or public policy matters;
- Service Connections: where Members lobby for individuals, or the electorate more broadly, to secure assistance through individual 'case' work or program or infrastructure-based 'project' work';
- Symbolic Connections: where Members build cultural and emotional connections to demonstrate their closeness with community; and

[47] Richard Fenno, 'US House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration'. *American Political Science Review*, Vol 71(3), 1977, pp. 883-917; Richard Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Boston: Little Brown, 1978.

[48] Heinz Eulau and Paul D. Karps, 'The Puzzle of Representation: Specifying Components of Responsiveness'. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol 2(3), 1977, pp. 233-254.

[49] Donald D Searing, 'The Role of the Good Constituency Member and the Practice of Representation in Great Britain'. *Journal of Politics*, 47(2), 1985, pp. 349-50.

[50] Gianni Zappala, 'Challenges to the Concept and Practice of Political Representation in Australia', Research Paper No. 28, 1998-9. Canberra: Department of the Parliamentary Library, 1999, p. 16.

[51] Koop et al, *Representation in Action,* pp. 16-25.

[52] Pandanus H Petter, 'Against the Void: Constituency Work and Connection Building Evidence from Australia'. *Parliamentary Affairs,* Vol 76, 2023, pp. 382-400.

- Party Connections: where Members build or demonstrate ties with their political party.

APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

To understand how Members of the House of Representatives demonstrate their connection to their electorates through constituency statements, I chose to examine the most recent sitting year, 2024, in which there were 60 instances of periods of three minute constituency statements with a total 608 statements made, including 117 statements by Ministers and Assistant Ministers.[53] Analysing the Hansard transcripts of constituency statements made during the year, I drew upon the framework above to classify the content of these statements into five groups (Policy, Symbolic, Service, Party and Mixed) based on the connection themes and actions described within.

Policy statements

Policy statements related to legislative and policy matters, with a broad range of topics including cost of living, foreign policy, budget measures, funding for various government services and programs, and impacts from the policy of another party or level of government.[54] Frequently, these statements included comments about perceived achievements and/or failings of the current or former government.[55] While these policy statements were linked to the interests of the electorate, that link ranged from extensive connection to community matters[56] to what was sometimes a more cursory mention of the electorate by name in a more general policy matter.[57] This variation is consistent with the observations of Koop et al about the different motivations of Members who emphasise policy connections, some of whom may

[53] Statistics held by Procedure Office, Department of the House of Representatives. 10 statements were made at each occurrence of members constituency statements, except for 15 February, 4 July and 21 November (9 statements each); 27 March (11 statements) and 21 November (20 statements, in a double-length period).

[54] For example, statements by M. Ryan and A. Giles, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 15 May 2024, pp. 2820, 2824.

[55] For example, statements by J. Wilson and D. Coleman, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 27 February 2024, pp. 1374-1375.

[56] For example, H. Haines, Commonwealth*, Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 3 July 2024, p. 4944.

[57] For example, A. Byrnes, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 1 July 2024, p. 4679.

'do so with less reference to local concerns and preferences' and instead act as an advocate to constituents for their own policy preferences.[58]

Symbolic statements

Symbolic statements were most similar to the type of constituency statement referred to by Mr Albanese in his 2008 statement referenced above and encompassed a very wide range of celebratory, commemorative and other community-building statements, for example statements about the significant anniversary of a sporting club, the death of a notable community leader, the achievements of a local hero or, most frequently, a Member's attendance at community events.[59] These statements and the activities described within align closely with Petter's descriptions of Members' efforts towards 'broader symbolic connections to the electorate and its life as a whole' to build electoral support and signal their inclusion in the community,[60] as well as Koop et al's commentary that Members seeking symbolic connection 'are often interested in presenting themselves as one of the people'.[61]

Service statements

Service statements demonstrated the actions of a Member to lobby for outcomes on behalf of the electorate. The small number of Service statements made described acts of advocacy and representation by the Member for community groups or the electorate as a whole, as well as direct acts of service, such as removing graffiti.[62] This is consistent with Petter's observation that Members largely engage in service for community groups or the whole electorate, with fewer undertaking one-on-one assistance for individuals in the electorate.[63]

[58] Koop et al, *Representation in Action*, p. 21.

[59] For example, statements by D. Le, R. Ramsey, K. Pitt, M. Scrymgour, D. Repacholi and D. Smith, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 21 August 2024, pp. 6047-6052.

[60] Petter, *Against the Void,* pp. 395-396.

[61] Koop et al, *Representation in Action*, p. 22.

[62] For example, statements by L. Howarth, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 18 March 2024, pp. 1704-1705, and J. Burns, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 11 September 2024, p. 6575.

[63] Petter, *Against the Void,* pp. 393-394.

Party statements

Party statements demonstrated ties between the Member and their party, and included statements supporting a local candidate running in a state election or detailing a visit to the electorate by the party leader or others in the party executive.[64] Few statements made during 2024 could be classed exclusively as a Party statement, although party themes were more frequent in Mixed statements, as discussed below.[65] Petter noted that, in an era where political parties may be distrusted by the public, 'emphasising one's party affiliation may create tension' for the Member[66] and this hypothesis appears to be borne out in the kinds of connections drawn upon in constituency statements.

Mixed statements

Mixed statements contained more than one of the above categories in the same constituency statement, either as a statement with distinct sub-statements on different connection themes[67] or as a single statement with significant crossover between multiple connection themes.[68] Statements which made only brief mention of another theme were classed with their main connection theme, rather than labelled as Mixed. Mixed statements mostly contained Symbolic and/or Policy connection themes, although some also contained Service and Party themes.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Using the classifications described above, I categorised each constituency statement made during 2024 by Member Type (Government Frontbench, Government Backbench, Opposition Frontbench, Opposition Backbench, Crossbench) and by Connection Style (Policy, Service,

[64] For example, statements by K. Pitt, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 10 October 2024, p. 7141, and C. Caldwell, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 26 February 2024, p. 1213.

[65] For example, a Mixed (Symbolic and Party) statement by A. Leigh, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 30 May 2024, p. 3376.

[66] Petter, *Against the Void*, p. 388.

[67] For example, a statement with three sub-statements, two Symbolic and one Policy, by S. Rae, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 19 August 2024, p. 5769.

[68] For example, a statement with both Symbolic and Policy themes throughout by L. Coker, Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 10 September 2024, p. 6433.

Symbolic, Party, Mixed) to understand the differences in the statement content across groups of Members. The results of this classification are included below at Table 2.

Table 2. Number of Constituency Statements by Member Type and Connection Style

	Number of Statements (% by Member Type)				
	Government Frontbench	**Government Backbench**	**Opposition Frontbench**	**Opposition Backbench**	**Crossbench**
Policy	27 (23%)	56 (30%)	51 (50%)	46 (34%)	37 (55%)
Symbolic	54 (46%)	93 (50%)	34 (34%)	61 (45%)	16 (24%)
Service	7 (6%)	8 (4%)	6 (6%)	11 (8%)	5 (7%)
Party	-	-	1 (1%)	5 (4%)	1 (2%)
Mixed	29 (25%)	30 (16%)	9 (9%)	13 (10%)	8 (12%)

Note: summed percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

As Ministers made Mixed statements at a rate higher than other Members and Policy statements at a rate much lower, I examined the Mixed statements made by government frontbenchers to understand the incidence of each of the other four Connection Styles as themes within those statements. Each of those 29 Mixed statements contained two or three connection themes, and none contained all four; the final tally of themes in Mixed Statements occurring is detailed at Table 3 and is consistent with my observation above that Mixed Statements most often contained Symbolic and/or Policy themes and less commonly Service and Party themes.

Table 3. Occurrence of Connection Style Themes in Mixed Statements made by Ministers

Theme	**No. of mixed statements containing theme**
Policy	24 (83%)
Symbolic	26 (90%)
Service	9 (31%)

Party	5 (17%)

My findings demonstrate that the content of Ministers' constituency statements during 2024 was most often Symbolic in connection style. Almost half of all constituency statements made by Ministers were Symbolic (46 per cent of statements), a slightly higher rate than other Members on average (42 per cent). If counting Mixed statements with Symbolic themes, this rises to over two thirds of all statements by Ministers being, at least in part, Symbolic in content. Ministers' rate of Service statements was also the same as other Members on average (six per cent) and, while they did not make any Party statements, the small number of Ministers' Mixed statements involving Party elements was consistent with the low numbers of Party statements made overall by Members.

Ministers made fewer constituency statements with a Policy connection style (23 per cent) when compared to all other Members on average (39 per cent). By contrast, the Shadow Ministers and crossbenchers made policy statements at nearly twice the rate of Ministers (50 and 55 per cent, respectively); even accounting for Policy themes in most Mixed statements, Ministers still made fewer Policy statements in comparison. Additionally, I did not observe any occasions of Ministers using a Policy statement to make commentary on matters specifically relating to their portfolio. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest that Ministers are using constituency statements to further policy agendas more than is 'normal' for other Members, or in their capacity as Ministers.

As noted above, Ministers made more Mixed statements than other Members, at almost twice the rate (25 per cent compared to 12 per cent). These Mixed statements almost always contained Symbolic and/or Policy themes, with fewer statements including Service or Party themes. The frequency of Ministers making Mixed statements may be an impact of this period being one of the few opportunities for them to speak on matters which impact their constituencies; whereas other Members may be able to split multiple matters between this period and Members' 90 second statements during a sitting, that is not open to Ministers. There is some evidence that sub-statements, whether Mixed or on a single connection theme, are valuable as individual social media clips to share with constituents.[69]

[69] For example, a Symbolic statement that was split into two YouTube videos by the Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories. K. McBain, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 6 February 2024, pp. 85-86; Kristy McBain, 'Opening of the new Narooma Mountain bike Trails', *YouTube*, 15 February 2024. Accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=48YMPApwOgY; Kristy McBain, '90th Anniversary of the Queanbeyan Bowls Club', *YouTube*, 15 February 2024. Accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXQMfqwyS4w.

Although this model is valuable for demonstrating the differences in the content of statements made by Members for the purposes of this article, it is possible that the connection styles demonstrated in constituency statements do not reflect the style and intensity of the actual constituency work which they undertake. Future research could consider undertaking statement-based analysis as an adjunct to the type of observational studies and surveys undertaken by Koop et al and Petter. This would provide a chance to explore whether Members' connection activities and self-reported connection styles directly correspond to the connection styles shown in statements made in the House and whether this varies between Ministers and other private Members.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have demonstrated that implicit concerns that Ministers will misuse opportunities for private Members are not borne out in Ministers' participation in Members' three minute constituency statements in the Federation Chamber of the Australian House of Representatives. The 47th Parliament saw an increase in Ministers' participation in constituency statements; although this has come at a trade off with fewer speaking opportunities for government backbenchers when compared to previous parliaments, opportunities for all government Members are now more in proportion with their membership in the House due to changes in practice for scheduling speakers. Furthermore, application of the Representational Connections Framework to the content of statements shows that Ministers in the House of Representatives are not using this period to make statements about portfolio matters and most frequently make symbolic statements demonstrating their connection to constituents, consistent with the intent of the item of business.

See also, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Maintenance of the standing and sessional orders.* Parliament of Australia, Canberra, November 2024, p. 22.