

Divisions, Bells and Pairs

Divisions

A division is a method to determine by voting the majority view of Members of the Legislative Council (MLCs) or Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), in their respective chambers on a bill, amendment, motion or ruling.

All questions before either the Legislative Council or Legislative Assembly are determined by a majority. Most questions are initially decided on the voices when the Chair (President or Speaker) expresses an opinion on the outcome as to whether the 'Ayes' or 'Noes' are said to 'have it'. However, a Member may challenge and call for a division or formal count which then decides the majority view of the Members present. It also means that a public record of the vote by each member in the chamber is recorded.

Main Steps in a Division

- When a division is called by a member, the Chair declares 'Is a Division required'? Any 'strangers' withdraw from the Chamber and the Chair will order the division bells to be rung for two minutes to enable members to return to the Chamber.
- After the time has expired the Chair will order the doors to be locked and no member will enter or leave the Chamber until after the division.
- The Chair will state the question and direct the 'Ayes' to pass to the right of the Chair and 'Noes' to the left.
- The Chair will appoint at least one Teller (a member) to each side.

- After counting the votes the Tellers will sign their respective lists (which for convenience have the names of the members printed in party lists).
- The Chair will declare the result of the Division. In the event of an equality of votes the President or Speaker may give a casting vote.
- In the Legislative Council the official record of the division is printed in the Minutes of the Legislative Council. In the Assembly the official record is printed in the Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. The record of divisions in both Houses are also printed in Hansard which also records any 'pairs' arranged for the vote.

Pairs

Pairs, although not officially recognised in parliamentary procedure in the Western Australian Parliament (and most other Parliaments), are published in Hansard. A pair is an arrangement entered into between the Government and Opposition and sometimes between 'minor parties' or Independents, whereby an equal number of members may be absent from a division without altering the anticipated result of the division. For example, a pair arrangement may enable a Minister to be on interstate business, a member to attend a constituency function, or be absent from the Parliament due to sickness, without altering the expected result of a division. Party whips often keep a pair book to help manage the pair arrangements.



Divisions, Bells and Pairs

Bells for Divisions

(and other parliamentary procedures)

Legislative Council

(bells ring with red lights illuminated):

- A division - 2 minutes
- An initial quorum - maximum of 10 minutes
- Absence of quorum – 2 minutes
- Appointment of member to a Committee - 2 minutes
- At time appointed each day for proceedings - 5 minutes intermittently
- For resumption following suspension - 5 minutes

Legislative Assembly

(bells ring with blue lights illuminated):

- A division - 2 minutes
- A quorum - 2 minutes
- Appointment of member to a Committee - 2 minutes
- At time appointed each day for proceedings - 5 minutes to 1 minute intermittently, and with 1 minute to go another minute.

Note: To inform members of an adjournment of proceedings both Houses very briefly ring the bells for their chamber.

Below is an historic example of a Division, recorded in Hansard, in the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly. The motion in 1899 was for the provision of women's suffrage (the right to vote) in Western Australia.

Legislative Assembly, 12 July 1899

Ayes (17)	Noes (6)
Sir John Forrest	Mr Burt
Mr A. Forrest	Mr George
Mr Higham	Mr Illingworth
Mr James	Mr Kingsmill
Mr Kenny	Mr Wallace
Mr Leake	Mr Wilson (Teller)
Mr Mitchell	
Mr Monger	
Mr Oldham	
Mr Pennefather	
Mr Piesse	
Mr Rason	
Mr Solomon	
Mr Throssell	
Mr Vosper	
Mr Wood	
Mr Quinlan (Teller)	

Legislative Council, 17 August 1899

Ayes (8)	Noes (6)
Hon. H. Briggs	Hon. D.K. Congdon
Hon. J.W. Hackett	Hon. S. J. Haynes
Hon. R.S. Haynes	Hon. D. McKay
Hon. A.B. Kidson	Hon. J.E. Richardson
Hon. W.T. Loton	Hon. H.J. Saunders
Hon. G. Randell	Hon. F.T. Crowther (Teller)
Hon. F.M. Stone	
Hon. E. McLarty (Teller)	

