



PRINCIPLES FOR MEETING WITH YOUR MP

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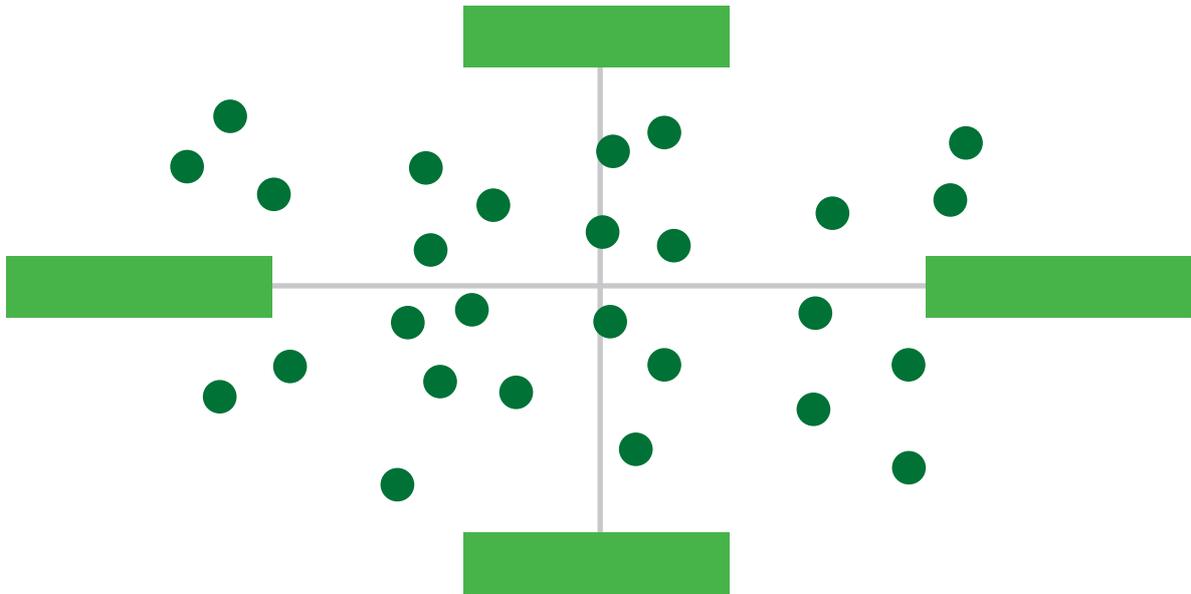


One-on-one meetings with members of parliament have the potential to be highly effective in raising awareness or gaining support on an issue. The effectiveness of these meetings is determined by a number of factors. Rarely is it exclusively the political ideology of the MP that dictates their position. In the last parliament, a number of independent senators became champions on issues as a result of intense lobbying and engagement. The following are principles to consider in an engagement campaign.

Meeting your MP can be a great way to engage them on a particular issue, however it is also a great way to build and maintain a relationship. MPs need to know the 'mood' in their community and you can be a valuable asset to them, just as they are to you. Having a healthy relationship with your local MP is always helpful when an issue you and your community feel particularly passionate about arises. It also helps them to do their job, and they know this. Do not be afraid of requesting a meeting.

SCHEDULING YOUR MEETING

Whether we like them or not, we must remember and respect that our MPs have busy schedules and thus, getting a meeting can sometimes take time. There are a few tips and tricks that will help you to avoid undue waiting periods.



Request a meeting with the best person

A power map based on the issue should be developed to identify the potential MPs to engage from the government, opposition and independents (House of Reps and Senate).

This analysis should not be based on marginal seat-holders but instead, their relationship to decision-makers and influencers.

Once the targeted list of MPs has been finalised, your own capacity or the capacity of the group you are working with must be assessed. You always have a stronger chance of securing a meeting with your/your group's local MP. [To identify your State or Federal MP please refer to the Resources page at the back of this document.](#)

When assessing capacity, consider how many local constituents you currently have that can visit these MPs. This is where most local lobbying efforts fail, as they do not have sufficient capacity in the places it is needed.

There is no definitive number, but a delegation of three to six local constituents is optimal. Most MP offices will ask the names of those attending when scheduling the meeting, to confirm they are local constituents. Therefore, this must be completed well in advance.

You can always seek meetings with MPs that are outside your own area, but you will have less success and will need to provide compelling reasons why the MP should meet with you.

Also consider whether there is senator worth meeting that represents your local area.

Sometimes, you may be invited to speak to another member of staff. Do not underestimate their influence. Approach these meetings exactly as you would when meeting with an MP.



Time your request for the greatest impact

The saturation principle makes the most impact. Identify when your issue is likely to be discussed in parliament (or when your target is likely to be able to deliver your ask), and either visit many MPs or schedule many meetings with the target MP around this time.

Normally, the week before a scheduled caucus meeting when parliament resumes is a good time to schedule a meeting. Most parties will caucus after a parliamentary break (these meetings are generally not advertised, but can be assumed to be the first sitting day after break).

Do not attempt to schedule a meeting when parliament is sitting. You can find out when parliament is sitting at your State's parliamentary website. [To identify your State or Federal Parliamentary Calendar please refer to the Resources page at the back of this document.](#)

Remember, it is always easier to impact policy decisions before they are made, rather than after.

Politicians are also likely to be influenced by media and increased public discussion and debate. It is helpful if you are able to schedule your meeting during or just before periods of peak public interest.

Politicians are also far more receptive during election periods, although they may also be far busier. If you can schedule your meeting in the lead-up to relevant elections, this will give you a good chance of success. This is especially important if your delegation includes a good cross-section of your community and there is already significant public debate about your issue.

In order to give yourself the best chance of getting a meeting when you want it, it must be scheduled with plenty of time. Generally, try to request a meeting about two months before the ideal meeting date. It's easier to get your preferred meeting date and to book in advance with state MPs, but harder with federal MPs.

Know who can give you what you want (and treat them accordingly)

MPs rarely, if ever, manage their own diaries. Either their PA or a dedicated Diary Manager will be responsible for scheduling an MP's meetings. Sometimes, they will check with the MP—but, on many occasions, they manage the diary at their own discretion.

Whether you're on the phone, in the office or writing in, always treat the PA courteously, even if they're difficult to deal with. If you find yourself on a first name basis with an MP's Diary Manager, you may find yourself getting more positive responses to your requests.

Make your request in multiple formats

Start the process with a phone call. If nothing else, this should tell you who manages the MP's diary and thus, who you need to contact directly. If you are lucky enough to speak to the Diary Manager on the phone, make a point of being friendly with them.

Most MP offices will ask that you submit your request in writing. Do this via email as soon as possible after the initial phone call. You want the Diary Manager to remember you and the conversation you had over the phone. If you spoke about something specific and direct, refer to it in the email.

Finally, send a written letter request.

[To find your State or Federal contact details please refer to the Resources page at the back of this document.](#)

Take the right people with you

It is important to carefully consider who you are going to take with you to the meeting.

First, it is much better to go in a group, rather than by yourself. You don't want to run the risk of not being taken seriously, not being listened to, being written-off as a lone 'loony', or being talked at rather than listened to. This is all far less likely if you are in a group. Other people also provide great moral support.

Having too many participants at a meeting can be just as damaging. It means there is a risk of too many viewpoints confusing the issue, the MP feeling like they are being 'ganged up on', etc. The ideal number of attendees is between three and six.

Next, consider which supporters would best represent your issue. Your aim in selecting your group members is to ascertain who will help you deliver a compelling story in a structured way, and who will help demonstrate that your issue is supported by

people across all sectors of the MP's community. Sometimes, you will not be lucky enough to be able to be selective with the people that you take. If you are, you should consider the following questions.

- Does the person live in the local area?
- Do they contribute to the diversity of the group and accurately represent the diversity of the community?
- Do they have a compelling story to tell or personal experience with the issue?
- Are they able to follow instructions?
- Are they able to keep their cool and behave respectfully?
- Are they members of established and known community groups, on whose behalf they can speak?

As a general rule, you are ALWAYS better to have one less attendee than to take someone who you believe represents a risk to the success of the meeting.

You should also consider whether you would like to invite media to the meeting. This is not uncommon; however, it can drastically alter the responses you get from your MP. They may be far more reluctant to speak openly or to give you a commitment with a media representative in the room.

A better idea is to take a photo of the meeting before you leave. This is standard practice and most MPs will not have an issue with it; in fact, many will ask you for a photo for their own community-based communications. Once you have the photo and a few quotes, you can contact the media after the meeting if required.

If you intend to invite the media to the meeting, notify the MP's office ahead of time.

Keep your request factual and concise

PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING

Get to know your MP

MPs are people, just like you. They have interests and values, and there are certain ways of framing a discussion that will appeal to one individual more than another. The more you know about your MP, the better you will be able to tailor your case and your ask.

Try to find answers to the following questions:

- What party does the MP belong to and what is the party position on your issue?
- Do they hold any position in government or on the shadow front bench which is relevant to your issue/ask, or could be used for leverage/influence?
- What are their values and why did they get into politics?
- What are their biggest concerns for the community they represent?
- What have they said on record? (Looking at their initial parliamentary address is a good place to start).
- What causes do they support?
- What are their interests outside of parliament?
- Are they religious? If so, what denomination?
- What are their views on key issues related to the issue you want to discuss?
- Are they a member of any parliamentary committees or working groups?
- Are they in a safe or marginal seat?

You will need to do some research to learn this information.

You can, of course, use Google to search for key terms along with your MP's name. You can also look at your State's parliamentary website or your MP's personal website, if they have one. Many MPs are active on social media, and if you follow their accounts you will learn a lot about them and the issues they consider to be important. You can also look at speeches they have made in parliament by checking out the Hansard Records on your State's parliamentary website. [To find your State or Federal Hansard Records please refer to the Resources page at the back of this document.](#) Finally, there are a few independent websites which offer profiles of the policy positions of members of parliament, such as [They Vote For You](#) and [Open Australia](#).

You don't want to waste your MP's time by asking for a commitment or explanation that has already been made public. Check the Government's website and recent news articles on the issue to double-check you know what the Government and/or your target MP has been saying already.

Also ensure you know how to pronounce your MP's name correctly, and how to address them.

NB: Your MP will usually bring another member of staff into the meeting with them.

Get across your issue

Familiarising yourself with the issue allows you to be confident and comfortable, and avoid being railroaded or losing your cool if you are put under pressure by your MP. That said, you will not be expected to know everything there is to know about your issue. It's okay to say you don't know something or that you'll get back to them. It is far more important to demonstrate that you and your community care than it is to demonstrate extensive knowledge of the issue.

Find out what the Government or MP has previously said/done on the issue. You can find this out by looking up the website of the relevant Government Department or giving them a call.

You also need to know what effect your issue has had on the community that the MP represents, or the likely impacts on that community. A broader knowledge of the issue can be helpful, but it's the impact on and the feelings of the local community that will be most compelling to your MP.

Whilst you should avoid building your meeting around endless statistics and facts, they are important to know in case the MP asks you a question or challenges your position. Try to take two or three key facts and/or statistics into the meeting with you.

Familiarise yourself with common counterarguments and be equipped to deal with these in case they are raised in the meeting.



Say what you want to say

Always aim to be clear and concise.

Generally, there are five key components that should be considered and allowed for at any meeting with an MP:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Make your case
3. Discuss the issue
4. Make your ask
5. Wrap up and confirm commitments

Only go into a meeting to discuss one issue. Do not use more than three case studies or stories to support your position.

A few key statistics are good to have up your sleeve, but remember that these statistics should be relevant to the MP specifically and should support your argument and case studies/stories. Rarely will statistics alone achieve the commitment you're after. **Personal stories from constituents are far more likely to get the job done.** Often, photos that demonstrate your case can be helpful. Ideally, these should be used to complement personal stories.

After you have researched your MP, you might feel like you know their position on your issue.

Never assume this to be the case and always ask your MP their views on the issue you are raising and the case studies you use to highlight your point.

Prepare for your meeting as if your MP knows nothing about your issue. Pitch it at a very basic level, use proper English and do not use acronyms or abbreviations. You will quickly get a sense of whether you need to speak in more depth and you may need to adopt a higher-level tone.

You must prepare for your meeting based on the time you have been allocated. This will usually be 30 minutes, but can depend on the MP and their availability.

You should also be prepared for your meeting to be cut short. Sometimes your MP will be late to the meeting, and sometimes they will be called away before it concludes. This is not to be taken as a sign of disrespect or disinterest—these things just happen. If your meeting is cut short and you haven't had a chance to get your key messages across or make your ask, ensure you schedule another meeting before you leave.

Don't forget that your meeting is not a presentation. You will need to allow enough time for your MP to respond and for discussion. This can often take up half of the meeting, but you should not allocate any less than one third of the total meeting time for this.

Make a clear and realistic ask

Be clear on what you are asking and keep your MP accountable with clear deliverables and a scheduled follow up. Keep in mind that, in most cases, it's unrealistic to expect them to change anything individually.

A good ask is for your MP to raise the issue at the next caucus meeting via Caucus Secretary (each party has an equivalent). Have the Caucus Secretary also confirm the meeting with a letter to the appropriate minister.

Whatever your ask, it must be something that the MP can actually achieve and it must be helpful for your issue. Depending on the issue, your MP and other factors, it may make sense to have two or three asks of your MP.

Train for success

Training is fundamental to achieving successful outcomes. Many meetings have destroyed relationships, often before they've even begun. Training should be completed the week prior to the lobbying meeting. This should be a full run-through of the meeting. If you can get an ex-politician or someone familiar with this environment to play the role of the MP, this is helpful.

It is not a training session based purely on delivering facts, but how to develop relationships and agree on values and principles. All individual groups can be brought together for a single training. No delegation should attend the meeting without training; this represents a major risk. Photos and other collateral are also important to obtain and test.

In addition to this full training session, individual members of the delegation can practice their own parts in front of a mirror.

NB: You cannot over-practice before a meeting with your MP!

Assign team roles

On some occasions, you will only have as little as 15 minutes to meet with your MP—sometimes less. Assigning roles will help ensure the meeting goes smoothly, that you cover everything you need to cover in the allotted time, and that you avoid the undesirable situation of people speaking over the top of one another.

Consider the following questions when allocating roles:

- Who will introduce the members of the delegation (including their name, address and one fact that highlights their role in the community or the diversity they bring to the group, e.g. their job)?
- Who will deliver the case around the issue?
- Who will deliver personal stories supporting the case (maximum three)?
- Who will deliver the ask?
- Who will conclude the meeting and summarise commitments and timeframes for follow up (this person will also hand over any supporting documentation)?

Take supporting materials with you

There are a few things that are important to take with you to your meeting, including a brief that summarises your case.

Your briefing document should explain the issue and detail who is being affected, what can be done to tackle the problem, what specific actions you are asking the MP to take, and your contact details for further correspondence.

It is usually best to hand the MP briefing documentation at the end of the meeting, rather than at the beginning. This is to avoid wasting the valuable time you have with them while they look through the material, and also a situation where they are half-listening and half-flipping-through-a-document you have provided.

Remember, your MP will likely have an adviser or two with them. Take three to four copies of any resources you wish to give your MP, and also give them to any other staff present at the meeting.

Items to take to the meeting:

- Business cards.
- A pen and paper.
- A summary of your case and case studies, including images, to be given to the MP at the end of the meeting (one to two pages is best).
- A summary of your key messages, to check you have covered everything before walking out of the meeting.
- A camera or camera phone for taking the photo.
- Visual aids or props that can help you get your point across, and can be left with your MP to remind them of your visit. These should not be offensive and should only be used if they actually add to your case.

AT YOUR MEETING

If you have prepared well for your meeting, things should flow quite smoothly. Even so, there are a few key things to remember.

Give yourself plenty of time

As you will no doubt have figured out by the time you go for your meeting, MPs are busy people. You should never show up late—nor should you show up red-faced and sweating because you’ve had to run from the train station or from the parking spot it took you much longer to find than you anticipated. Not only will you run the risk of missing your meeting altogether, but you will have made a bad first impression and will have an uphill battle from there.

Aim to be at your meeting no later than 30 minutes before it is scheduled. It is better to arrange to meet an hour beforehand to run through your roles and key messages one last time before you go in. Often, these review sessions will happen over a cup of coffee. Don’t forget to go to the bathroom before you go in.

Once you are in the meeting, you need to keep things clear, concise and on-topic. You should each know your roles and allocated time, and you should stick to these strictly.

Politicians are brilliant at changing the topic or skirting around questions. If this is happening, it is important that you gently try to bring them back to the issue at hand. Try saying something like, ‘I know your time is precious, so we’d really like to stay focussed on the issue while we have the opportunity to meet with you. If you do have more time, we would be happy to discuss the bigger picture.’

First impressions count

Make sure you dress appropriately. Depending on where you meet with your MP, this may require you to dress more formally than you normally would. Depending on your delegation, you might like to remember the diversity of your group you are trying to showcase in choosing what each of you will wear. However, as a general rule, it is far better to be over-dressed than under-dressed. It is a good idea to wear what you will wear to the meeting to your group training session, and ask for feedback.

When you first walk into the office, a receptionist will likely greet you. Introduce yourself and the

purpose of your visit, and follow their instructions. Sometimes, this will be the person you have been corresponding with about the meeting. If so, make sure you thank them for their help.

When you are introduced or introduce yourself to participants of the meeting, make sure you make eye contact, smile and give a firm (not rough) handshake. Don’t forget to thank the MP and any other staff present for their time.

Behave like you’re making a friend

You may have no interest at all in being friends with your MP, but you should conduct yourself in the meeting with the goal of connecting on a human level. Remember, building a lasting and respectful relationship should be one of the goals of any meeting with an MP.

Don’t be scared

When speaking, try not to feel intimidated. It is in your MP’s best interest to build a strong relationship with you also, and it is their job to listen to and act on behalf of their constituents. Be confident but not arrogant, firm but respectful, passionate but calm. Respect their time and stay on-topic.

Don’t forget your manners

Remember that, while building a relationship is important, this is still a formal meeting. As such, it is important that you do not speak over each other or engage in any form of argument with each other or anyone in the room. Never speak over your MP.

If a question is addressed at a specific person, let that person answer the question.

You should never lie or provide misinformation. It is okay to simply say you don’t know, or you’ll get back to them.

Never talk badly about the MP’s party. You can definitely site policies and public comments, but attacking the MP’s party will not win you any favours and may cost you a successful meeting.

It is important to speak in your own words, so that your MP knows they are dealing with a real person. Do not read a script or try to memorise a story in someone else’s words.

Talking is only one of the ways that you can come across as unprofessional, argumentative or just plain rude. Your body language is equally important. Sit up straight, and maintain eye contact when speaking or being spoken to. Do not roll your eyes, fidget in your chair, scoff, fiddle with your hands or do anything else that might be seen as disrespectful or distracting.

Listen, listen, listen!

By the time your meeting comes around, you will have thought about and practiced what you are going to say, but it is equally important that you don't forget to listen carefully. It is not uncommon in these meetings that you will learn things you didn't know before. This may include information about roadblocks around your issue, the political processes, who supports your position, etc.

Equally importantly, by listening you will be able to gauge what level of understanding your MP has on your issue, and adjust your delivery accordingly.

If your MP shows a lot of interest in a particular case study or statistic, drill into it a little further. If they seem disinterested by others, do not go into too much detail.

If an objection is raised or a question asked, address it immediately.

Consider assigning a note-taker

Note-taking can be a valuable thing, but it can also be risky. You have the potential to capture key quotes and action items from the meeting, but if you are constantly note-taking, it is difficult to engage in meaningful conversation. Further, you may run the risk of the MP being more cautious with what they have to say.

If you decide to take notes, assign this task to one person only and have them only capture key points.

NB: You will need to ask your MP if you intend to use any quotes in the media.

Make a convincing ask

The key to making your ask is to keep it clear and easily understood. Your MP needs to have absolutely no doubts about what it is you're asking them to do.

If they commit to your ask, you need to ask them when they will do it and also to notify you once it's done with an update on the outcome.

If they do not want to commit to your ask, ask them to justify their position.

Before you leave

There are a couple of things you need to check before you leave the meeting. It can help to have these things written down with you to remind yourself.

- Ensure you have exchanged business cards with your MP AND all staff present. It is a good idea to also give one to the Diary Manager on your way out.
- Know when your MP will deliver, and how you will know that they have.
- Cover all of your key messages.
- Thank the MP and all staff present.
- Summarise the actions for each party coming out of the meeting and the associated timelines.
- Hand over your briefing document.
- Ask to take a photo.

AFTER YOUR MEETING

Debrief

Sit down as a team to discuss the meeting as soon as possible after it is concluded. Ideally, this will happen directly after the meeting so it is fresh in people's minds. You want to talk about what worked, what didn't and what might be improved upon for the next meeting.

You may also want to use this opportunity to create your follow up email, discuss any other follow up actions required and assign roles—for example, who will contact the MP and when.

Initial follow up email

Send the MP a follow up email ASAP after the meeting concludes. This should not be more than 48 hours after the meeting.

First and foremost, thank the MP for their time and consideration.

Make sure you have sent through any further information that was promised to the MP.

In this email, you should also remind the MP of any further information they committed to getting to you, as well as any other commitments they made at the meeting. Having these commitments down in writing is important, and will also help ensure that the MP knows this is something you expect delivery on, and will follow up as required.

Post on the MP's social media accounts

You may not agree with your MP's position on the issue you are discussing, but it is important to remember that your relationship with your MP is important and gives you power. Putting a comment on their Facebook page thanking them for meeting with you is rarely done, and should earn you some brownie points.

Stick to timelines

If you've presented your case well, and have participated in the meeting following the guidelines above, you will have given yourself a great chance of getting a commitment on your ask. You will have also attached timelines to this commitment. Make sure you set yourself a reminder to follow up on any commitments before the deadline.

If you do not receive a response within a week or by the newly-allocated deadline, you will need to follow up again.

Do not get impatient or frustrated. MPs are dealing with many issues at any given time, and there is every chance that, while your issue may be your top priority, it may not be theirs. If you remain politely persistent you will eventually get the promised action.

Engage the local media

If you have captured strong quotes, have approval to use them and have taken a good picture, you may be able to engage local media through talk-back radio and letters to the editor, for example.

You should only do this if there is a strategic reason to do so, and you should always consider what impacts it will have on the relationship you are building with your MP.

Keep your MP up-to-date

One thing that is often overlooked is tracking the development of an issue and its presence in the community and local media, and sharing this with your MP.

If they are genuinely engaged in your issue, this will be a valuable help for them and will keep them interested and updated. It will also strengthen the relationship you have started to build.

Send these updates during times when there are significant developments or changes regarding your issue. Do not contact your MP with every article published on the issue.

RESOURCES

Identify your Federal Electorate, Member, or Senator

apps.aec.gov.au/esearch

Find the contact details for your Federal Member or Senator

aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members

NSW Find your State MP

parliament.nsw.gov.au/members/Pages/all-members.aspx?&house=both&tab=browse

QLD Find your State MP

parliament.qld.gov.au/members/current/list

SA Find your State MP

parliament.sa.gov.au/Members/Pages/List%20of%20All%20Members.aspx

TAS Find your State MP

parliament.tas.gov.au/tpl/datasheets/MP_State_Federal.htm

VIC Find your State MP

parliament.vic.gov.au/members/results

WA Find your State MP

parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/memblast.nsf/wallmembers

Federal Parliamentary Calendar

aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Sitting_Calendar

NSW State Parliamentary Calendar

parliament.nsw.gov.au/Pages/sitting-day-calendar.aspx

QLD State Parliamentary Calendar

parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-assembly/sitting-dates

SA State Parliamentary Calendar

parliament.sa.gov.au/AboutParliament/ParliamentToday/Sitting/Pages/SPByPS.aspx

TAS State Parliamentary Calendar

parliament.tas.gov.au/ha/hsit.htm

VIC State Parliamentary Calendar

parliament.vic.gov.au/about/daily-calendar/yearly-sitting-dates

WA State Parliamentary Calendar

parliament.wa.gov.au/WebCMS/WebCMS.nsf/index

NSW State MP contact details

parliament.nsw.gov.au/members/Pages/all-members.aspx

QLD State MP contact details

parliament.qld.gov.au/members/current/list

SA State MP contact details

parliament.sa.gov.au/members/Pages/Members.aspx

TAS State MP contact details

parliament.tas.gov.au/ha/halists.pdf

VIC State MP contact details

parliament.vic.gov.au/members/ministers

WA State MP contact details

parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/memblast.nsf/wallmembers

Federal Hansard records

aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard

NSW State Hansard records

parliament.nsw.gov.au/hansard/Pages/home.aspx?state=housepapers

QLD State Hansard Records

parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-assembly/hansard

SA State Hansard Records

parliament.sa.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/GeneralHansardInformation.aspx

TAS State Hansard Records

parliament.tas.gov.au/ParliamentSearch/2016/ISYSQuickSearch2016.html

VIC State Hansard Records

parliament.vic.gov.au/hansard

WA State Hansard Records

parliament.wa.gov.au/hansard/hansard.nsf/NewAdvancedSearch



Wilderness Society

The Wilderness Society

GPO Box 716, Hobart Tasmania 7001, Australia

TELEPHONE: (03) 6270 1701

FACSIMILE: (03) 6231 6533

EMAIL: info@wilderness.org.au

ABN 62 007 508 349

wilderness.org.au