

Accountability Changes with Australia's Minority Government

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The Australian Public Accounts Committee

- ▶ Legislative joint committee with 16 members
- ▶ 100 year anniversary in 2013!
- ▶ Scrutinises the use of public resources
- ▶ Historic expenditure focus
- ▶ Main activities:
 - Oversight of Parliamentary Budget Office and Audit Office (including reviewing all audit reports)
 - Policy inquiries (e.g. federal state financial relations)

Senate Estimates Committees

- ▶ Detailed budget and expenditure scrutiny
 - ▶ Questioning of officials (with ministers present)
 - ▶ Everything in scope
 - ▶ Publicly broadcast
 - ▶ Strong media focus
 - ▶ Government Chair
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- ▶ No single committee with dedicated budget framework or transparency mandate




Australia's Minority Government

2010 *'Agreement for a Better Parliament'*

"Principles:


- ▶ *Transparent and accountable government*
- ▶ *Improved process and integrity of parliament..."*

Key aspects:

- ▶ Ensure supply
 - ▶ Changes to procedure, including committees
 - ▶ Range of other changes...
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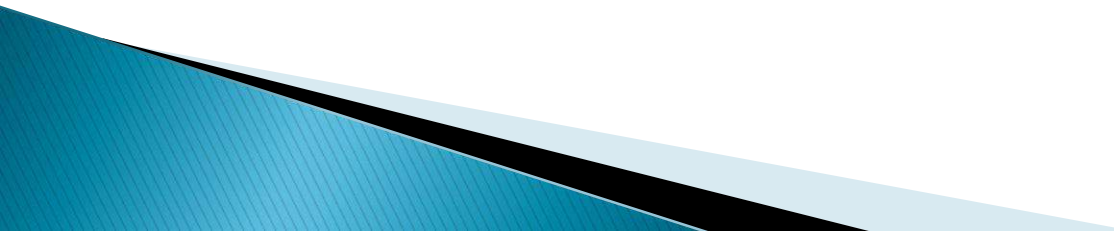
Agreement for a Better Parliament (2)

Supply & consultation

- ▶ Agreement for private consultation (pre-budget & pre-dissent)
 - ▶ Supply guarantee ... annual budget only?
 - ▶ Has meaningful consultation occurred?
 - ▶ Has this increased accountability and transparency?
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Agreement for a Better Parliament (3)

Parliamentary practice and procedure

- ▶ Several standing order changes – mostly timing of business
 - ▶ Additional time for private members business
 - ▶ Additional time for budget debate?
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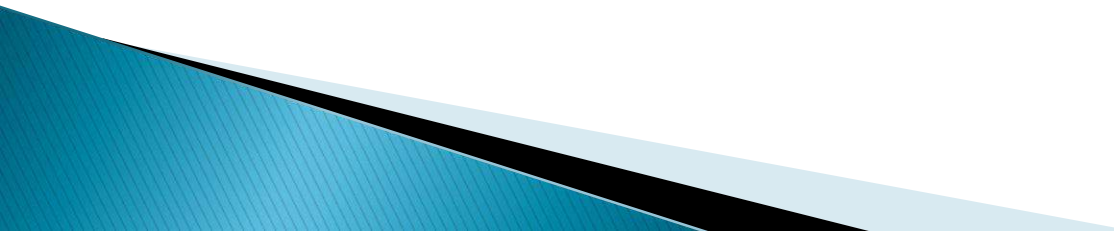
Agreement for a Better Parliament (4)

Committees

- ▶ Increased number of Bills Inquiries!
- ▶ 6 months set for Government responses
- ▶ PBO Committee ... PBO legislated in 2012!
- ▶ Public Accounts Committee
 - Given oversight of PBO (\$, work plans, evaluations)
 - Non-government Chair (currently independent)

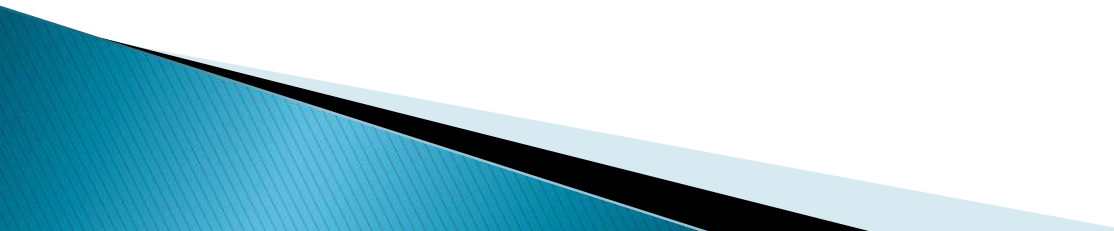
Parliamentary Budget Office

Does the PBO increase transparency and accountability?

- ▶ Election periods require public costings
 - ▶ ‘Own motion’ work
 - ▶ Submissions to committee inquiries
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Agreement for a Better Parliament (5)

Other elements

- ▶ Whistle blower legislation (*incomplete*)
 - ▶ Code of conduct (*incomplete*)
 - ▶ Parliamentary Integrity Commissioner (*incomplete*)
 - ▶ Donation disclosure changes (*incomplete*)
 - ▶ Creation of a Regional Australia Minister
 - ▶ Several policy initiatives pre-agreed (e.g. climate change action & poker machine reform)
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Conclusions

- ▶ Is anyone watching?
- ▶ What's actually happened?
 - Changes to parliamentary processes
 - More work to do...
- ▶ Budget scrutiny?