

Election Timetable and Caretaker Conventions

August 2013

On 4 August 2013 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that he had asked the Governor-General to dissolve Parliament and call the Federal Election for 7 September. This paper is intended as a general guide to some of the processes and procedures that take place during the lead up to a Federal Election and outlines some of the key dates for the 2013 Federal Election.

Election Timetable

Event	Requirements	2013 Date
Prorogation of Parliament	Three years after first meeting or at Governor-General's discretion	5:29 pm 5 August
Issue of Writs	Within 10 days of dissolution	5:30 pm 5 August
Close of Rolls	Close at 8pm, 7 days after writs	12 August
Close of Nominations	12 noon, between 10 and 27 days from writs	15 August
Declaration of Nominations	24 hours after close of nominations	16 August
Lodgement of Senate Voting Tickets	48 hours after close of nominations	17 August
Polling Day	Between 23 and 31 days after close of nominations	07 September
Return of Writs	100 days after the issue of writs	13 November at the latest
Meeting of Parliament	Within 30 days from return of writs	14 November at the latest



Caretaker Conventions

Following the announcement of a Federal Election, and the subsequent dissolution of the House of Representatives, a caretaker period of government is enacted until either a clear election result has been determined or, in the event of a change of government, the new government is appointed.

As the Executive can no longer be held accountable to the parliament for decisions made during this time, and with the possibility of an imminent change of government, a number of conventions relating to the incumbent government's ability to make certain decisions have been established.

While in many respects the regular business of government and administration continues without change, Ministers and public servants must take into consideration the implications of major policy decisions, significant appointments and contract undertakings, for example, that may bind an incoming government and limit its freedom of action.

It should be noted that these conventions are not legally binding but rather subject to interpretation. Accordingly, variances between Ministerial offices, departments and other statutory bodies may exist in their implementation.

Major Policy Decisions

During the caretaker period, governments should avoid undertaking major policy decisions that would commit an incoming government. While the definition of 'major' is a matter of judgement, careful consideration should be given where the decision being taken is a matter of contention between the Government and Opposition, as well as to the amount of resources required to implement the policy.

Where a decision must be made that binds an incoming government, the relevant Minister should consult the Opposition spokesperson prior to its implementation.

Major Contracts or Undertakings

It is convention for Governments to avoid entering major contracts or undertakings during the caretaker period. Once more, the definition of 'Major' may be subject to interpretation however, in most cases it may be defined by dollar value or whether the commitment involves routine administrative work and/or implements a politically contentious policy.

Where a contract or undertaking is unavoidable, the Minister should consult the Opposition spokesperson or termination clauses may be included in the contract in the event of a change of government.

It is also advisable that agencies wishing to complete tenders during the election period should warn contractors that the tender may not be completed in the event of a change of government.