

WES-KAAPSE PROVINSIALE PARLEMENT
WESTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT
IPALAMENTE YENTSHONA KOLONI



Western Cape Provincial Parliament

The Western Cape Provincial Parliament is the legislative authority of the Western Cape Province. It is one of nine similar provincial legislatures in South Africa representing the second level of government, the first level being national Parliament and the third level being the local authorities. The provincial Parliament is situated at 7 Wale Street in Cape Town in a building completed in 1944 to house the Provincial Council of the erstwhile Cape Province. The building became the seat of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament in 1994 when the new democratic political dispensation was instituted. Over the years the building, with its impressive archways, has become a Cape Town landmark.



House at work

The Chamber of Parliament is situated on the sixth floor, with the rest of the building being occupied by offices for Members, their support staff, parliamentary officials and facilities for Members as well as a number of executive departments.

Parliament consists of 42 Members, elected for a period of five years through a system of proportional representation, i.e. a political party's candidates are elected in proportion to the number of votes a party wins of the total number of votes cast in the general election of the province. Vacancies are filled from party lists depending on which party a previous Member belonged to. In addition to the 42 Members, two Ministers can be appointed from outside. Apart from the fact that they have no voting rights, they are otherwise regarded as full Members.

The political parties currently represented in the House (another name for all the Members meeting in the Chamber of Parliament in order to conduct business) are the African National Congress, the New National Party, the Democratic Party (the latter two parties form a coalition known as the Democratic Alliance), the United Democratic Movement and the African Christian Democratic Party.

The parliamentary Chamber consists of a rectangular hall with at one end a raised dais where the presiding officer sits, signifying his or her authority and responsibility. Directly in front of the dais is the Table where the Secretaries are seated. They advise the presiding officer and Members on procedure and record the formal minutes of the House. On the Table in front of them is the Mace, the symbol of authority of the Speaker and of the right of Members to exercise their freedom of speech. Each Member has his or her own seat, with Members of the majority party or coalition to the right of the Speaker (who usually presides), and Members of the opposition and other non-government minority parties to the left. Ministers and senior opposition Members sit on the front benches. All Members address the House from their places.

To the right and left of the Speaker's Chair are designated seating areas for senior civil servants and Hansard reporters who record the debates. The general public and media representatives are accommodated in galleries at either end of the Chamber.

The Speaker

The first action of the House following an election is to elect one of its Members to be Speaker. At the same time, a Deputy Speaker (who is also Chairperson of Committees) is also elected to assist the Speaker with his or her duties.

The Speaker is the chief presiding officer and the political head of the administration of Parliament. He or she presides over sittings of the House, maintains order and ensures that Members adhere to the formal procedures, rules of debate and of the House, calls Members to speak, proposes questions for debate and discussion, puts the question at the conclusion of debates, conducts divisions and declares decisions, rules on points of order and matters of misconduct, and takes disciplinary action against Members who transgress the rules.

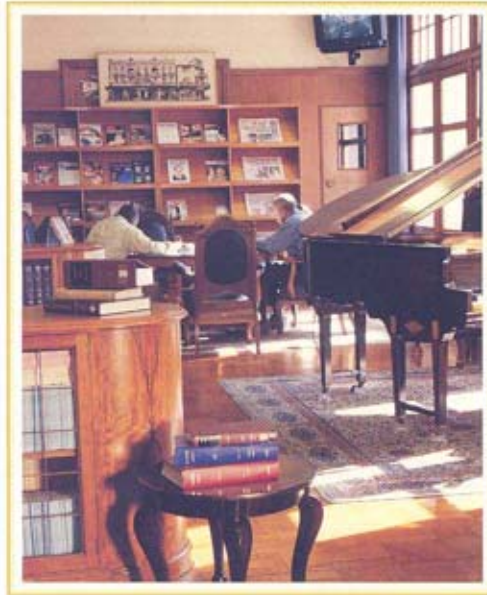


Robes of Speaker and Deputy Speaker

The Functions of Parliament

The main functions of Parliament are to pass laws falling within the category of affairs assigned to it in the national Constitution, to oversee the functions of the Provincial Administration and ensure that it is accountable to Parliament and the public, to determine and control its internal affairs, to ensure the participation of the public and local authorities in its proceedings, and to ensure proper participation by the Province in the activities of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

In respect of national legislation that affects the interests of provinces, Parliament has the power to propose amendments to such legislation, which has to be taken into account by national Parliament. It also has the power to pass provincial legislation falling within its legislative jurisdiction.



Library

After an election the political party (or coalition of parties) which has the most Members in the House becomes the governing grouping. Its leader becomes the Premier and other Ministers are appointed by the Premier from amongst its members.

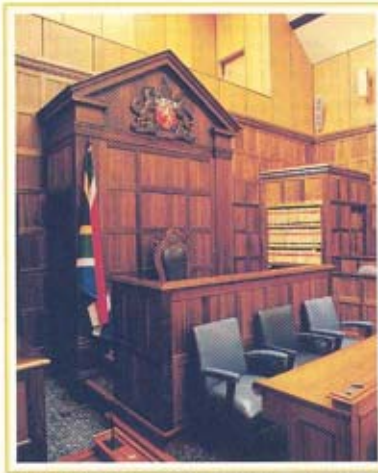
Parliament keeps the provincial Government and Administration accountable to it by means of several processes. Debate of legislation and ministerial policy, discussion of matters of public importance, committee investigations and public hearings and written and oral questions and interpellations to Ministers relating to their work and responsibilities are means to keep Parliament informed of the activities of Government departments and to intervene if necessary. All proceedings are open to the public.

The Government cannot generate income or spend money unless allowed by law through the passage of enabling legislation by Parliament. Expenditure is also examined by parliamentary committees.

Sittings

Sittings of the House take place from Mondays to Fridays, and the sitting hours are from 14:15 until adjournment, except on Fridays, when sitting hours are from 10:00 until adjournment. An Order Paper is published for each sitting day, which contains the agenda of business to be dealt with on that day. The order of business for each sitting is set down in the Rules of the House (the Standing Rules).

The largest proportion of time is taken up with debate on government business, mainly the consideration of Bills (proposed legislation) and debates on departmental activities (departmental budget votes). Questions to Ministers and interpellations (short debates on a matter of topical interest put to a Minister) have precedence over other business on Tuesdays. Time is also set aside for the discussion of motions on matters of public interest proposed by individual Members and to committee reports. A large proportion of the work in Parliament is done by parliamentary committees.



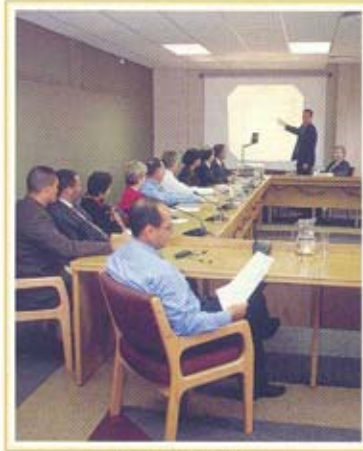
The Speaker presides over the sittings of the House.

Committees

The Western Cape Provincial Parliament has a number of standing committees to assist the House in performing its functions. Apart from the internal committee dealing with procedural, administrative and household matters (Rules Committee) and the standing committee responsible for NCOP related matters, there are a number of standing committees dealing mainly with legislation and matters of public importance.

Each standing committee, consisting of between 5 to 20 Members of all parties, is responsible for monitoring the activities of a certain number of government departments. Bills tabled in Parliament are referred for investigation and report to the relevant standing committee depending on the government department it emanated from.

More detailed discussion on Bills and other matters can be held in committee, which invariably leads to the passing of better legislation. As a result, Bills are often amended by them. Committees can conduct public hearings, call for written submissions from interested parties and hear oral evidence. They monitor the activities of government departments by calling for presentations by senior officials and Ministers. Committees are the ideal vehicle for Parliament to fulfill its role in terms of the Constitution, which makes provision for participatory democracy, accountability, transparency and public involvement in the legislative processes. Committee meetings are generally open to the public, unless a Committee resolves, in an exceptional instance, to consider a matter in camera.



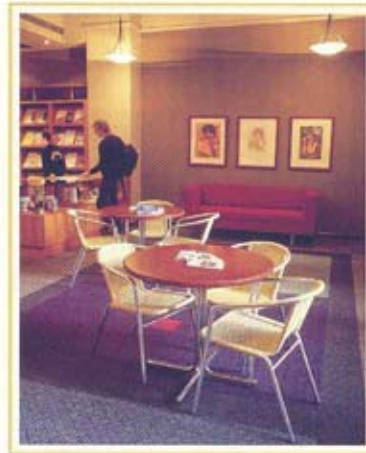
Committee at work

Visitors

Visitors are welcome to visit the provincial Parliament. Guided tours of the parliamentary complex can be arranged in advance through the Communication section, as well as permits to attend debates. This section will gladly provide any additional information required about Parliament and its activities. The contact details are as follows:

Communications Officer
Western Cape Provincial Parliament
P O Box 648
Cape Town, 8000
Tel: (021) 483 3290
Fax: (021) 483 3361

In addition, you can browse the Western Cape Provincial Parliament website at www.wcpp.gov.za for more information on the provincial Parliament and its activities.



Visitors' Centre