Glossary

Cabinet A committee of ministers that forms the apex of executive decision-making.

Charter of Budget Honesty An Act that provides, among other things, for a pre-election costing of government and Opposition commitments and policies during the caretaker period. The charter is the subject of significant controversy.

Constitution The set of rules by which a country or state is governed. In Australia, the Constitution was written in the 1890s and it sets out the structure of Australian federal government and its relationship to the states. The Constitution can only be explicitly amended by referendum.

Convention Non-legal rules that guide political practice in areas on which the Constitution is silent.

Dissolution of the House of Representatives The House of Representatives is dissolved by the Governor-General under mechanisms specified in the Constitution (ss. 5 and 57).

Double dissolution Colloquial term for dissolution of both the Senate and the House of Representatives arising when the Senate blocks, fails to pass or amends a Bill unacceptably on two occasions with a gap of at least three months.

Executive Council A committee of the Governor-General or Governor meeting with members of the Cabinet. Governor-General-in-Council/Governor-in-Council gives legal effect to many of the decisions of government, such as subordinate legislation and appointments.

Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system The New Zealand electoral system, introduced in 1996, is based on each elector having two votes — one for a party and one for a local candidate.

Prorogation of Parliament A discontinuation of a session of Parliament without dissolving it.

Royal Assent The Governor-General or Governor gives assent to laws when they have been passed by Parliament. This is the final step in the legislative process, with assent giving legal effect to Bills — which then become Acts.

Subordinate legislation Legislation that does not need to be enacted through Parliament and made under the authority of existing Acts. Material that might form the basis of subordinate legislation includes by-laws, orders, ordinances, statutory instruments and notices. Subordinate legislation is signed off by the Governor-General/Governor-in-Council.
Westminster government  The Westminster model of government is based on practices of the British government, with such practices being adopted by a range of representative democracies. Elements of the Westminster model include: parliamentary sovereignty; a collective and responsible Cabinet; ministers accountable to Parliament; a non-partisan and permanent civil service; and an Opposition recognised as an executive-in-waiting.

Writ  A document commanding an electoral officer to hold an election. The writ contains dates for the close of rolls, the close of nominations, election day and the return of the writ.
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