

Parliamentary Consent for War

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN
PARLIAMENTARY CONSENT FOR WAR
DEFENCE AND VETERANS

The Australian Democrats are adamant that Parliamentary consent is needed before Australian troops are sent to any overseas conflict, except in the case of an emergency where gaining such consent would be impractical.

In 2003 the Howard Government became the first Australian Government in history to commit Australia to war without the support of our Parliament. It is no surprise that this decision has since turned out to be a grievous mistake. The Prime Minister's deliberate flouting of convention demonstrated contempt for Parliamentary process and for the people of Australia. It is crucial that this does not become an established practice in our democracy.

“That Government only sought approval to go to war in Iraq retrospectively. The fact this was voted down in the Senate shows that the Executive can't take its authority as being absolute and must bring such decisions to the Parliament for consideration.”

Senator Andrew Bartlett
Spokesperson
on Defence

Our Action Plan

The Democrats have introduced a Bill into the Senate amending the *Defence Act* that will ensure Parliamentary consent to send our troops into overseas conflicts except in emergency situations.

The Issues

It is unacceptable that the Prime Minister has the power to send our troops to war without the support of the United Nations, the Australian Parliament or the Australian people and without the Governor-General needing to authorise the decision.

The Howard Government is the first Government in our history to go to war without majority Parliamentary support. The PM put the issue to the Parliament only after the decision had been made. This saw the Senate vote against the decision to commit Australian troops to war in Iraq at almost the same time as the bombs began to fall on Baghdad.

The Democrats aim to take the decision to commit troops to overseas conflict out of the hands of the Prime Minister and a subservient and secretive Cabinet, and place it with the Parliament, unless there is an emergency situation.

Having a legislative mechanism available to review an Executive decision to send our troops abroad would mean greater scrutiny of the circumstances under which that decision was made.

Except in the most extreme situations, the merits of troop deployment must be made open and accountable through Parliamentary scrutiny.



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