AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY

Citizenship Ceremony Integrity Policy

CCI-P 2026/01

Operative policy making citizenship ceremonies non-partisan, simultaneous and constituent-based

A citizenship ceremony is the last public act by which the Commonwealth welcomes a person as a citizen. It is not a campaign event, a ministerial hospitality list, or a gift the government of the day distributes to friendly members. When invitations go out early to government and Greens members and late, or not at all, to Coalition, independent and other non-government members, the ceremony stops being a welcome and becomes an argument about who owns the new voter.

This paper is Government policy. The Australian Citizenship Amendment (Ceremony Integrity) Act 2026 gives it legal effect. The Department of Home Affairs, councils that host ceremonies, and any Minister administering the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 are to apply this paper until that Act commences and, after commencement, consistently with it.

1. Purpose and status

1.1 This paper states Australian Government policy on who must be invited to an Australian citizenship ceremony, when they must be invited, on what basis the list is built, and what a Minister or department may not do with that list.

1.2 The policy answers the defects disclosed in Senate estimates in February and March 2025, and pressed again in 2026 by Senator James Paterson, about the Department's industrial-scale pre-election ceremonies: staggered invitations, venue-only lists that missed sitting members whose constituents were being conferred, additional ministerial invitations to government members and a government candidate while sitting independents and opposition members were omitted or delayed, and a Code that already required balance but had no statutory force.

1.3 The policy does not slow conferral. A person who has been approved under the Act is entitled to make the pledge. What it stops is the use of the welcome as a partisan instrument.

2. Policy problem

2.1 In late February and early March 2025 the Department of Home Affairs, at the direction of the then Minister, ran a concentrated program of departmental ceremonies. About 25 ceremonies conferred citizenship on approximately 11,900 people from 145 nationalities. The Department's own evidence was that venues were chosen for availability and capacity, and that the program was scheduled inside a window of the Minister's diary.

2.2 Subsequent reporting and estimates evidence established the following, which this policy treats as the problem to be closed:

(a) twenty-one of the twenty-five ceremonies were held in Labor-held seats; only one was hosted in a Coalition-held seat;

(b) the Department invited the local member for the venue and, on its account, a member of an alternate major party; additional invitations were made by the Minister's office;

(c) invitations were staggered — government and Greens members were commonly invited on or about 13 February 2025; Coalition senators were invited days later, in some cases after the RSVP date;

(d) some ceremonies invited a Greens MP and a Labor senator and no Coalition senator at all (including the Brisbane example of the member for Brisbane and Senator Watt);

(e) the sitting independent member for Fowler was not invited to the Olympic Park ceremonies at which Fowler residents were conferred, while the Labor candidate for Fowler attended;

(f) other sitting members whose constituents were on the list, including the member for Hughes, said they received no invitation from the Department or the Minister;

(g) contact details for federal members and senators were supplied on request rather than pushed to every relevant office;

(h) in April 2025 a sitting opposition member's speaking role at a council ceremony was withdrawn on the eve of the event by reference to caretaker advice, while the government member for the same locality still spoke.

2.3 The Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code already told organisers to invite the local federal member and a senator from the government, the opposition and the cross-bench where not already represented, and already required speeches to be apolitical, bipartisan and secular. The Code is a departmental document. It did not bind the Minister's office. It did not require simultaneous dispatch. It did not require every federal member with a conferree from their division to be invited when the venue sat in someone else's seat. It had no public register and no consequence for a staggered or selective list.

2.4 The Department's defence was process, not intent: request-based contact, procurement-driven venues, no ministerial direction on who to pick. Intent is not the test. The effect was partisan. New citizens met the government and its allies first. Non-government members met a closed door or a late email. That is the mischief.

3. What the existing Code already requires

3.1 The Code requires ceremony organisers to invite all elected officials of the electorate at all levels of government, including local federal members and a senator from the government, opposition and cross-bench where not already represented through the local federal members. It requires local state or territory members and local government representatives. It forbids an invited elected representative from sending a delegate to act in an official capacity. It reminds members and senators that speeches must be apolitical, bipartisan and secular and that political, commercial or religious material must not be distributed.

3.2 All federal members and senators have standing authorisation to preside. An invitation to attend is not an invitation to preside. The Minister has precedence if present.

3.3 Those rules are sound as far as they go. They failed in 2025 because they sat in a guidance document, because departmental ceremonies were treated as a special class in which the Minister could add guests, and because "the local member" was read as the member for the venue rather than every member whose constituents were in the room.

4. Policy objectives

The objectives of this policy are:

(a) to put the invitation rule in the Act, not in a Code the Minister can shade;

(b) to invite every federal member who has a conferree drawn from their division, not only the member in whose seat the hall happens to sit;

(c) to invite, for every ceremony, a senator of the government, a senator of the Official Opposition, and a senator who is neither, from the State or Territory of the venue;

(d) to dispatch every mandatory invitation at the same time, with the same notice and the same RSVP date;

(e) to put sitting members ahead of candidates;

(f) to stop a Minister adding party colleagues or candidates unless the same invitation is made, at the same time, to every sitting member with a conferree at that ceremony;

(g) to apply one rule to departmental ceremonies, council ceremonies and ceremonies hosted by a parliamentarian;

(h) to stop venue choice and diary windows being used as a substitute for a balanced list;

(i) to keep speaking roles available on equal terms during an election or caretaker period;

(j) to publish an invitation register after each ceremony and a report to Parliament each year.

5. Who must be invited

5.1 For every citizenship ceremony at which a pledge is administered, the organiser must invite, as official guests:

(a) every member of the House of Representatives whose division includes the usual residential address of one or more conferrees at that ceremony;

(b) the member for the division in which the venue sits, whether or not a conferree from that division is present;

(c) at least one senator for the State or Territory of the venue who is a member of a government political party;

(d) at least one senator for that State or Territory who is a member of the Official Opposition;

(e) at least one senator for that State or Territory who is not a member of a government political party and is not a member of the Official Opposition, if such a senator exists;

(f) the local state or territory member for the district in which the venue sits;

(g) the mayor or equivalent of the local government area in which the venue sits, and of each local government area from which conferrees have been drawn if the ceremony is not hosted by that council.

5.2 If a class in paragraph 5.1(c), (d) or (e) has more than one senator for the State or Territory, the organiser invites the senator who maintains an electorate office nearest the venue. If that senator declines, the organiser invites the next nearest of that class. The duty is to the class, not to a favoured individual.

5.3 The Minister responsible for citizenship is always invited and has precedence to preside if attending. That precedence does not authorise the Minister to rebuild the guest list.

5.4 An invited elected representative may not send a delegate to act in an official capacity. Staff may attend as guests in the ordinary way.

6. Simultaneous invitation and equal notice

6.1 Every mandatory invitation for a ceremony must be issued at the same time, by the same method, with the same information and the same RSVP date. A difference of more than two hours between the first and last mandatory invitation is a failure of the duty unless it is caused by a documented systems outage.

6.2 Notice must be not less than 10 clear days before the ceremony, except where a conferree would otherwise lose the right to make the pledge because the 12-month period in section 26 of the Act is about to expire. Shortage of the Minister's diary is not an exception.

6.3 The Department must maintain a current contact register for every federal member and senator and must use it. Invitation is not request-based. Offices do not have to ask to be told that their constituents are being conferred.

6.4 If a mandatory invitee is identified after invitations have gone out, the late invitation must be issued immediately, the RSVP date extended for that person, and the fact recorded on the register with the reason the person was missed.

7. Sitting members before candidates

7.1 A person who is a candidate for election to the Parliament, and who is not a sitting member or senator, must not be invited as an official guest or offered a speaking role at a ceremony unless every sitting member and senator who is a mandatory invitee for that ceremony has already been invited.

7.2 A candidate must not be invited in substitution for a sitting member. The Fowler example — the sitting independent omitted, the government candidate present — is the case this rule forbids.

7.3 Nothing in this policy stops a candidate attending a public ceremony as a member of the public. What it stops is an official invitation, a speaking role, a reserved seat on the official party, and a photograph line that the sitting member was not offered.

8. Additional invitations by a Minister

8.1 A Minister may invite additional official guests. Additional invitations are not a second, private list. They are published on the same register, and they may be issued only if:

(a) every mandatory invitation has already been issued; and

(b) the additional invitation does not give a government member, senator or candidate a speaking role, reserved official seating or earlier notice that is denied to a non-government mandatory invitee at the same ceremony.

8.2 An additional invitation of a government colleague who has no conferree from their division, made while a non-government member who does have conferrees is omitted, is a breach of this policy and of the Act.

9. One rule for every host

9.1 The same invitation and speaking rules apply whether the host is the Department, a local government council, a parliamentarian, or any other authorised organiser.

9.2 Departmental ceremonies are not a special class. The 2025 program treated them as such. That is the gap the Act closes.

9.3 A council remains responsible for its own ceremony logistics. The Commonwealth's duty, when it supplies the approved list of conferrees, is to attach the list of federal members whose divisions are represented on that list, so the council is not left to guess.

10. Venue, backlog and regional parity

10.1 Venue selection must be capable of being explained by capacity, accessibility, cost and the residential distribution of people waiting to make the pledge. It must not be explained by the party of the local member.

10.2 A departmental ceremony program that concentrates conferrals in metropolitan seats while regional applicants wait is not a backlog program. It is a metropolitan program. When the Department runs a concentrated program it must offer equivalent scheduling to regional councils that have approved applicants waiting, or explain in the annual report why it did not.

10.3 Scheduling a program inside a Minister's personal window of availability is permitted only if the Minister is the presiding officer. The Minister does not need to preside. The Department must not delay or bunch ceremonies to fit a Minister who wishes to be photographed at them.

11. Election and caretaker period

11.1 From the day the House of Representatives is dissolved until the return of the writs, a speaking role already offered to a sitting member or senator must not be withdrawn on the ground of caretaker conventions, party affiliation, or the presence of a candidate. If caretaker guidance requires speeches to be confined to the welcome, that confinement applies to every speaker, including the government member.

11.2 A concentrated departmental ceremony program must not be commenced in the three months before a writ for a general election is expected to be issued, except to the extent needed to confer citizenship on a person whose section 26 period will otherwise expire.

12. Speeches and conduct

12.1 Speeches by official guests must be apolitical, bipartisan and secular. Party names, how-to-vote material, electorate boundary pitches, and attacks on other parties are not a welcome.

12.2 Material that is political, commercial or religious must not be distributed at the ceremony.

12.3 A speaking role must be offered to every House member with conferrees at the ceremony. If time does not permit every such member to speak, speaking places are allocated in the following order: the member for the venue; then members in descending order of the number of their conferrees present; and, so far as places remain, a senator of the Official Opposition and a senator who is neither government nor Official Opposition. A government senator does not take a speaking place ahead of a non-government member with conferrees.

13. Register and reporting

13.1 The Department must keep, for every ceremony at which it is host or for which it supplied the conferree list, a register showing: the venue and host; the number of conferrees by division and by local government area; each mandatory invitee; the date and time each invitation was issued; the RSVP date; whether the person attended; any speaking role offered or withdrawn; any additional invitation issued by a Minister; and the reason for any late or omitted invitation.

13.2 The register for a ceremony is to be published on the Department's website within 10 business days after the ceremony, with personal information of conferrees omitted.

13.3 The Minister must table in each House, within three months after the end of each financial year, a report of ceremonies in that year, including a statement of any failure of the simultaneous-invitation duty and any ceremony at which a mandatory class was not represented.

14. Implementation

14.1 The Australian Citizenship Amendment (Ceremony Integrity) Act 2026 inserts the duties into the Australian Citizenship Act 2007. The Code continues as operational guidance but cannot undercut the statutory floor.

14.2 Within 28 days after Royal Assent the Secretary must issue a contact-register protocol and a simultaneous-dispatch protocol to every ceremony host that receives a conferree list from the Department.

14.3 The first annual report under this policy covers the financial year in which the Act commences and must include a comparison with the 2025 departmental program.

15. Definitions

Code means the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code issued by the Minister administering the Australian Citizenship Act 2007.

conferree means a person approved to become an Australian citizen who is scheduled to make the pledge of commitment at the ceremony.

departmental ceremony means a ceremony hosted or conducted by the Department of Home Affairs or by a Minister rather than by a local government council.

mandatory invitee means a person who must be invited under section 5 of this policy.

Official Opposition means the party or coalition recognised as such in the House of Representatives.

organiser means the Department, council, parliamentarian or other person authorised to conduct the ceremony.

sitting member means a current member of the House of Representatives or a current senator.

16. References

Australian Citizenship Act 2007 (Cth), especially sections 26 and 27.

Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code (Department of Home Affairs).

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, Budget Estimates, 24 February 2025, evidence of Ms Stephanie Foster and Ms Sneha Chatterjee.

Senator James Paterson, Senate estimates questioning and subsequent public statements on departmental ceremonies, 2025–26.

Reporting of the 2025 Olympic Park, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart and Toowoomba ceremonies, including the Fowler and Hughes invitation disputes and the Rockingham speaking-role withdrawal.