

# The Despatch box



Above: The despatch box in the House of Representatives Canberra

## What is a despatch box?

Despatch boxes contain forms and religious books used during the swearing-in of new Members. They are located on either side of the House of Representatives table closest to the Speaker.

The Prime Minister, Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, the Leader of the Opposition and shadow Ministers stand at the despatch boxes when they speak in the House.

## What do they look like and where did they come from?

The boxes are made of rosewood decorated with enamel and silver. The despatch box replicas were given to the Australian Parliament in 1927 by King George V. They are replicas of two boxes, which sat in the House of Commons before they were destroyed by a bomb explosion in 1941 during the Second World War. Inside the lid of each box there is an inscription signed by the King. The boxes now symbolise the link between the British House of Commons and the Australian House of Representatives.

## What is the history of the despatch boxes?

The despatch boxes on the table of the House are a parliamentary tradition borrowed from the UK. The despatch boxes date back to early UK parliaments when Clerks and Members of Parliament carried their papers to the Chamber in boxes.