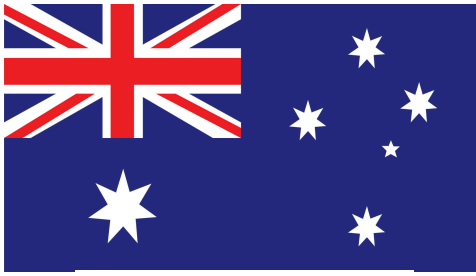


# UK Parliamentary Delegation Visit to Australia

## Report

February 2026



PARLIAMENT of AUSTRALIA

#### UK DELEGATION:

- Nick Smith MP, Chair of the Administration Committee - Delegation Leader
- Carolyn Harris MP, Deputy Leader of the Welsh Labour Party
- Robin Swann MP, Member of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
- Mike Wood MP, Opposition Whip and Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office
- The Rt Hon. the Lord Bruce of Bennachie, Member of the International Relations and Defence Committee
- Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie, Member of the International Relations and Defence Committee

#### PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Between 9-13 February 2026, a delegation of MPs and Peers travelled to Australia on a diplomatic visit with CPA UK to discuss shared foreign policy interests and exchange knowledge on common democratic and parliamentary practices. The programme was split between Canberra and Sydney, and included engagements with the Parliament of Australia and Parliament of New South Wales, as well as government institutions, think tanks, and civil society.

The delegation arrived during a tumultuous week in Australian politics. The visit coincided with the resolution of an ongoing split between the Liberal and National parties, who have traditionally comprised the Coalition, Australia's main centre-right bloc. Later that same week, Liberal Leader Susan Ley was ousted in favour of Angus Taylor, who became the new Leader of the Opposition. These developments unfolded against the backdrop of a rise in support for Pauline Hanson's One Nation party, which has risen to second place in national polling, and is placing increasing pressure on the traditional two-party system.

At the same time, mass protests erupted in Sydney during the state visit of Israeli President Isaac Herzog, reflecting heightened tensions around the Israel-Gaza conflict. These events mirrored ongoing issues that exist in UK politics, and were among the many similarities between the two countries that were highlighted by the visit.



*The UK Delegation met with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Milton Dick MP, and Hon. Sue Lines, President of the Senate, during their visit to the Parliament of Australia.*

The programme also served as an opportunity to reaffirm the longstanding friendship between the UK and Australia and their respective parliaments. This was evident through the consistently warm welcome that the delegation enjoyed from all stakeholders they met, as well as the notably open and frank conversations that took place on a range of common challenges throughout the visit.

This friendship was brought into closer focus in the wake of the recent terrorist attack at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025, in which 15 people were killed. The delegation visited the memorial at Bondi Beach to lay flowers in commemoration of the victims, before later engaging with the local Jewish community through a visit to Our Big Kitchen, a nearby Jewish-run charity that prepares and distributes more than a quarter of a million meals each year.



*The delegation received a tour of Our Big Kitchen from Rabbi Doctor David Slavin during their time in Sydney.*

## **ABOUT CPA UK**

CPA UK supports and strengthens parliamentary democracy throughout the Commonwealth. It focuses on key priority themes including climate, digital transformation, ending violence against women and girls, and trade.

Peer-to-peer learning is central to the way CPA UK works. CPA UK brings together UK and Commonwealth parliamentarians and officials to share knowledge and learn from each other. It aims to improve parliamentary oversight, scrutiny and representation and is located in and funded by the UK Parliament.

It delivers tailored programmes that include activities with individual countries and legislatures, and large scale projects and activities that bring together Commonwealth parliamentarians and clerks.

## Navigating superpower relationships

Discussions on foreign policy underlined shared concerns among UK and Australian participants about the direction of US foreign policy under President Trump, and the implications for both countries, whose international strategies have long been underpinned by a close partnership with the United States. Many Australian stakeholders expressed the view that the US's shift to a more unilateral approach reflected a deeper shift in America's global posture which will extend beyond President Trump's time in office.

At the same time, there was a widespread feeling that the United States remained an indispensable partner in counterbalancing China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. For this reason, there was widespread recognition that a close working relationship with Washington would continue to be essential for Australia. However, participants also noted the importance of diversifying its strategic partnerships to reduce over-reliance on any single partner, including both the US and China, including in defence, trade, technology, or other critical sectors.



*The UK delegation discussed mutual foreign policy interests with the Parliament of Australia's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.*

Strengthening cooperation with European partners such as the UK was seen as an important part of this shift, particularly given that challenges in these areas increasingly transcend geographic boundaries.

Nevertheless, deepening partnerships in the Pacific will continue to be a major priority for Australia. Collaboration with other likeminded Indo-Pacific countries, especially Japan, was viewed as essential to building a more resilient and balanced strategic environment. Officials shared that Australia has been increasing consultation on shared security challenges with a group of countries known as the 'Indo-Pacific Eight' which includes both Australia and the UK, as well as France, Germany, Poland, South Korea, New Zealand, and Japan.

Engagement with Pacific Island states to counter the growing influence of China within the region will also be a key pillar of Australia's foreign policy in the years ahead. The past decade has seen Australia step up outreach efforts to these countries, signing a number of bilateral agreements to strengthen cooperation in a variety of areas, tailored to the specific needs of these countries.

An especially high profile aspect of these outreach efforts has been Australia's bid for 2026 UN Climate Change Conference (COP). The Albanese government campaigned to host this event as a means of drawing attention to the climate challenges faced by Australia's Pacific Island neighbours, but faced a contending bid from Turkey.

After protracted negotiations, a compromise was agreed whereby the conference will take place in Turkey, but with Australia acting as President of Negotiations. Australian government officials expressed optimism that this format would enable the aims of the original bid to be fulfilled, and shared that the experience of cooperation with Turkey has thus far been a positive one.

However, some research fellows at the Lowy Institute, an international affairs think tank, expressed reservations about the sustainability of this working relationship. They also argued that Australia's bid to host had been undermined by a lack of agreement among ministers around the purpose of the bid, and suggested that the government would have been secretly relieved with the final outcome, as the Trump administration's scepticism toward net zero would have created problems in the bilateral relationship with the US that would have outweighed the diplomatic benefits of hosting the conference.

### **AUKUS Concerns and Opportunities**

AUKUS is a central element of UK and Australian defence collaboration with the US. The first pillar of this trilateral agreement is focused on procurement of nuclear-powered submarines, with the second dealing with developing advanced military technologies. Under the agreement, SSN-AUKUS submarines will be constructed in both the UK and Australia from the 2030s, and enter service in the 2040s, with the US supplying up to five Virginia class submarines to Australia in the interim.

AUKUS receives significantly more media attention in Australia than in the UK. Although it has bipartisan support from the ruling Labor party and the Coalition, it faces opposition from parts of both the left and right, including the Green Party, and former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Experts at the Lowy Institute drew a distinction between “strategic sceptics,” who believe AUKUS risks distorting Australia's defence posture and overcommitting it to the US, and “pragmatic sceptics,” who support the concept, but have doubts over whether it can be delivered.

There was a suggestion that British involvement in AUKUS needed to be marketed more heavily to the Australian public, to avoid the deal becoming associated solely with the United States. Proponents of the deal also highlighted the economic benefits it offers to Australia as an argument in favour of AUKUS. The agreement is expected to create more than 20,000 jobs over the next 30 years, chiefly in the states of Western Australia and South Australia.

Building the necessary skills base to support these jobs is essential to the delivery of AUKUS. A skills academy has been established in Osborne, South Australia, where the submarines will be built. There has been close collaboration and support from the UK's submarine construction yard at Barrow-in-Furness in this process.



*The UK delegation discussed the benefits and challenges of AUKUS with Matt Burnell MP (pictured centre), Co-Chair of the AUKUS Friendship Group.*

The UK will also play a major role in developing the infrastructure for AUKUS. £4 billion of contracts have been awarded to UK companies, including Rolls Royce, to design and manufacture SSN-AUKUS submarines.

There was also discussion around the economic opportunities of Pillar 2. Participants reported that this aspect of the agreement has generated enthusiasm within Australian industry, but the limited detail that has been released on this compared to the more clearly defined submarine programme under Pillar 1 has constrained the extent to which these opportunities have been explored.

### **Shared public health challenges**

The programme highlighted a strong appetite among UK and Australian parliamentarians to learn from each other's approaches to health and public wellbeing.

At the time of the visit, the UK Parliament was considering legislation to allow assisted dying in England and Wales. The House of Commons passed a Private Member's Bill in support of this measure, this was not ratified by the House of Lords before the end of the parliamentary session, leaving the future of this legislation uncertain.

In contrast, assisted dying is now legal across Australia, having been passed by all its states and territories in a period between 2019 and 2023. Australian parliamentarians noted that the legislative process across these devolved jurisdictions was often lengthy, and required extensive consultation and compromise. However, they felt implementation had been broadly successful; one member of the Standing Committee on Health remarked that they had overcome their initial opposition to assisted dying after observing its rollout.

The UK delegation expressed strong interest in Australia's ban on the use of social media by under-16s, especially in the context of similar debates taking place on this measure in the UK Parliament. Australian stakeholders were widely supportive of the ban, while acknowledging that it was "not a panacea" and that enforcement remains challenging. Social media companies have resisted the ban, and young people have found ways to circumvent age verification measures. There has also been debate about what qualifies as a social media platform, most notably in the case of YouTube.

However, it was noted that the ban had empowered parents to restrict their children's usage, and that the nature of social media meant that even those who could avoid the ban would stop using platforms if a large portion of their friends could not, and therefore verification measures did not need to work in all cases to be effective. Because of this, the ban has enjoyed cross party backing, as well as broad support among the population.

Australian parliamentarians were also interested in UK policies to address obesity, most notably the 'Sugar Tax' and recent reforms to regulate gambling. Both sides observed that the devolution of health powers creates challenges in communicating policy to the public. Australian members cited the example of a ban on poker machines in New South Wales, which was reversed after customers travelled to neighbouring Victoria instead, where the machines remained legal. Similarly, in the UK, devolved administrations have faced confusion when policy changes differ from those in Westminster, as the public will often assume new national policies automatically apply across all jurisdictions.



## Exchanging Parliamentary Practice

The delegation's visit to the Australian Parliament underscored a long tradition of exchanging knowledge and good practice with Westminster. One example of this is the Federation Chamber, an additional forum where parliamentary debates are held outside of the main House of Representatives chamber. This model helped inspire the creation of the Westminster Hall chamber in the UK Parliament, which has hosted House of Commons debates since 1999. While Westminster Hall is primarily a venue for backbench led discussions on local or topical issues, the Federation Chamber also considers legislation, though only at second reading, and without a final vote.

The two parliaments also share similarities in their committee systems. Like the UK, Australia has a Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security to provide oversight of its intelligence agencies. During the delegation's visit, the Parliament was progressing plans to establish a Joint Defence Committee, mirroring the role of the UK's Defence Select Committee. This legislation subsequently passed in early March 2026.

Both parliaments have seen substantial turnover in recent elections. In the House of Commons, 335 of 650 seats are now held by first-time MPs. In Australia, 30 of the 150 members of the House of Representatives are new to Parliament. Although a smaller proportion than in the UK, parliamentary officials noted this marks a departure from earlier decades, when members often served for much longer periods. This loss of institutional memory prompted the Australian Parliament to introduce a new members induction programme.



*Delegation Leader Nick Smith MP addressed a reception with members of the UK Friendship Group in the Parliament of Australia.*

The four day event, delivered shortly after the 2025 election, included a one day orientation to help new MPs set up their offices and access key services such as security and digital support.

This aspect of the programme was similar to the new members induction process that took place in Westminster following the 2024 General Election. Unlike in the UK, the Australian programme also featured a three day seminar, with sessions covering a variety of member's responsibilities, including chamber procedure, ethics, staff management, and parliamentary services.

Officials regarded the induction as broadly successful, but emphasised the need to balance providing new members with essential information on their roles, with the risk of overwhelming them with too much detail. They also stressed that the most valuable outcome of the process was enabling MPs to build relationships with colleagues and connect with key parliamentary staff who could guide them as they settled into their roles, rather than imparting them an in-depth knowledge of how to perform their roles, which can be developed over time.

## Next Steps

The visit affirmed the strong value of continued engagement between UK and Australian parliamentarians. Although current funding rules in the Australian Parliament limit opportunities for a reciprocal federal level delegation to Westminster, there are still a variety of forums through which these relationships can be strengthened.

CPA UK will look to prioritise deeper engagement with Australia's federal, state, and territorial legislatures through:

- **More frequent UK delegation programmes in Australia**, with visits planned every one to two years, subject to agreement from local partners.
- **Enhanced engagement with state and territorial representatives visiting Westminster.** CPA UK is currently exploring plans to host the Speaker of the Queensland Legislative Assembly in the second half of 2026.
- **Delivering events focused on Australian policy developments and lessons these offer for the UK Parliament.** In June 2026, CPA UK will host a discussion on Australia's Social Media Ban for under-16s, timed to coincide with the legislation's six month anniversary and the expected conclusion of the UK Government's consultation on this policy, due to report at the end of May.

CPA UK will continue to collaborate closely with a wide range of stakeholders to identify further opportunities for cooperation. This includes partners across Australian legislatures, the Australian High Commission in London, the British High Commission in Canberra, and the Australia team within the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.



*The delegation visited the Parliament of New South Wales during their time in Sydney, meeting with Hon. Greg Piper, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (front left), and Hon. Ben Franklin, President of the Legislative Council (front right).*

