

The Governor-General

and her part in the election process

The Governor-General has an important part to play in the stages of the election process. Remember that these are not political actions - she is not a politician. The things the Governor-General needs to do are constitutional and ceremonial actions. They help make sure all the correct steps are followed, so that we have a proper process and formation of a new Government after the general election. There are also lots of elements of tradition that have developed over centuries of Parliamentary history in Britain and New Zealand.

Step one:

The Governor-General signs the Proclamation dissolving Parliament. This is an official document signed by the Governor-General stating that Parliament will finish until after the election. She also states a date that the new Parliament must convene (meet) by. This date can be changed later with a new Proclamation, if the incoming Government wants a change. The Governor-General giving a date is a symbol of the Crown's commitment to preserve the continuity of Parliament in New Zealand.

Step two:

The Proclamation is read out by the Herald of Arms in public or published in the New Zealand Gazette. Once that has happened the dissolution of Parliament is official. Parliament stops sitting and the MPs focus on the election. The current government will keep governing the country until a new government is appointed. However, they are unlikely to make any major decisions for the country unless absolutely necessary (eg an emergency situation).

Step three:

The Governor-General then issues a writ (signs a formal instruction) telling the Electoral Commission to hold the General Election on the day that the Prime Minister has chosen. From 'Writ Day' political ads can be shown on TV, and played on the radio. The Writ puts the Chief Electoral Officer in charge of the election process. In the event of an emergency, the Chief Electoral Officer may delay voting.

General Election

Step four:

After the election the Governor-General does not get involved in the party discussions and negotiations about who will be the new government. She waits to be contacted by the leader of the political party or group of parties that have won enough seats in Parliament to form a government.

The Governor-General also relies on public statements by political parties, including from the ones that can't form a government. She must be certain the group claiming to be the new government have the support of enough members of Parliament to be able to pass legislation through Parliament and govern the country.

Step five:

The incoming Prime Minister and Ministers are invited to Government House, where they are appointed by the Governor-General. This is a formal ceremony where the Prime Minister and Ministers make promises in front of the Governor-General of loyalty to the King and on the good management of New Zealand. This has to happen even if there is not a change in the Prime Minister after the election. If there is a change, then the old Prime Minister comes to Government House to hand in their resignation before the new Prime Minister is appointed.

Step six:

(and Day One of the opening of Parliament)

Parliament is opened. This takes place over two days. Day One is the Commission Opening where the Royal Commissioners (Senior judges) are sent by the Governor-General to open Parliament. The Chief Commissioner also tells the House that the Governor-General will attend in person to deliver the Speech from the Throne. They also say it is the Governor-General's wish that a Speaker is elected by the House, and that the House's choice of Speaker should be presented to the Governor-General for confirmation. Once the Commissioners leave, Parliament can swear in the Members of Parliament and elect the Speaker, so that they are all set for the State Opening the next day. The new Speaker of the House is confirmed by the Governor-General at Government House.

Odd fact

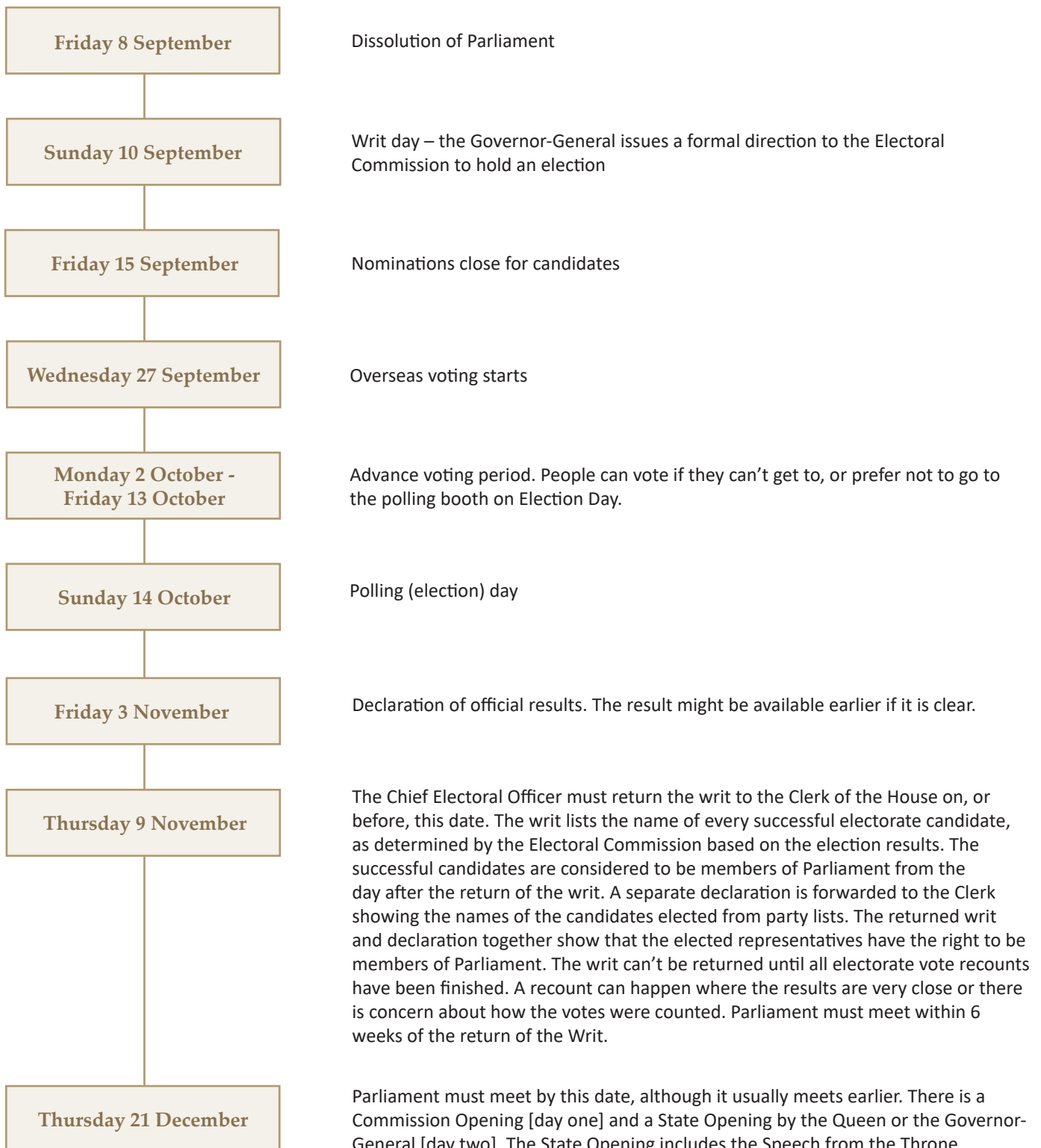
With the Commission opening, the Commissioners (three senior judges) walk to the debating chamber at Parliament. They give the Clerk a document from the Governor-General saying the Commissioners can act on the Governor-General's behalf. The Commissioners then declare Parliament open, inform Parliament that the Governor-General will be giving the Speech from the Throne the next day and tell them to elect a Speaker. They then leave the debating chamber. The Governor-General does not enter the debating chamber (as traditionally the King also does not enter the debating chamber). When the Governor-General performs the State opening and Speech from the Throne, the ceremony takes place in the former Legislative Council Chamber rather than the current debating chamber.

Step seven:

(and Day Two of the opening of Parliament)

The State Opening of Parliament. The Governor-General travels to Parliament and enters the Legislative Council Chamber. The members of Parliament are summoned to hear the Speech from the Throne which is read by the Governor-General. The speech is written by the government and sets out the things that they aim to do in their three-year term. After this, all the ceremonial bits are over, and Parliament can settle into its business.

Important Dates



Odd fact

The Writ is published on A3 goatskin paper. Goatskin is a thick and ornate paper or parchment. It was traditionally made from real goatskin but modern goatskin paper doesn't contain any animal products. It's guaranteed to last 500 years and it is called 'goatskin' because it has a watermark in the shape of a goat.

Dissolution of Parliament Proclamation signed by Governor-General.

The Proclamation is read out in public or officially published. Parliament is now dissolved (finished until after the election).

Governor-General issues a writ giving the date of the election.

The date has been chosen by the Prime Minister. The writ hands management of the election over to the Chief Electoral Officer.

The General Election takes place and NZ votes to choose a government.

People can vote from 27 September (overseas)/2 October in NZ. Election day is 14 October.

Discussions take place between political leaders to see who will form the next government.

The party/parties who can form a government contact the Governor-General. The new Prime Minister is invited with the Ministers to Government House to be appointed by the Governor-General. Before the New PM can be appointed the old PM (if there is one) visits the Governor-General and gives their resignation.

Parliament is opened in a ceremony called the Commission Opening in the debating chamber, so that MPs can be sworn-in and a Speaker of the House elected.

The Speaker visits the Governor-General to be 'confirmed'.

The day after the commission opening of Parliament, the State Opening is held.

The Governor-General reads the Speech from the throne in the Legislative Council Chamber. The speech lays out the new government's plans.



THE NEW SESSION OF PARLIAMENT IS NOW GOOD TO GO!