

Getting to know your Member of Parliament

Building a relationship with your Member of Parliament (or MP) is crucial if you want your issue to get attention.

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WHAT YOUR MP CAN DO FOR YOU

- Ask questions or raise issues in Parliament and other decision making forums.
- Help you to get information from government.
- Advise about government funding.
- Take your issue to the media.
- Talk to other MPs about your issue, including in the party room or in party policy forums.
- Sponsor your submission to a parliamentary committee.
- Take your issue to the Minister (by letter, or in person).
- Help build ties with other community or parliamentary groups.

By understanding what an MP can and can't do, you can tailor your 'ask' accordingly. For example, there's no point asking your MP to solve global warming or youth unemployment! Instead, think about what they can reasonably do about the issue, and ask them to do that! Be as specific as you can, eg, 'can you please write to the Minister / speak in parliament about this issue?'

FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR MP AND ELECTORATE

There is a lot of information on the Parliament of NSW and Parliament of Australia websites that will be useful in building a profile of your MP and electorate.

- What are they passionate about?
- Why did they enter politics?
- How do they present themselves, or try to define their political career?
- Who do they align themselves with? Are they part of a particular faction?
- What sort of people live in their electorate, and what issues does the electorate face?

For clues, look at the first speech they gave to parliament, referred to as an inaugural speech or a maiden speech. These can be found by searching on the Parliament of NSW website: <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/>.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR MP

Whether it's by mail, email, at an event or meeting, making regular personal contact with your MP is important to build a relationship. But don't overdo the contact – just go when you have something new to communicate. Your MP will appreciate any positive local exposure and networking opportunities you can present. Think about what you can offer in return for their support; perhaps you have local contacts and good ideas about how problems can be solved.

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WRITE TO YOUR MP

When writing or emailing there are a few points to remember:

- Use the correct title (check parliament house websites).
 - Introduce yourself and mention that you are a local constituent.
 - Introduce your issue and define the problem clearly.
 - Tell them why you care about the issue.
 - Keep it brief, simple and use plain language.
 - Offer solutions, and tell them what you would like them to do for you (your 'ask').
 - Be polite.
 - Include your contact details, date the letter and keep a copy.
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USEFUL TIPS

- Get to know your issue and your MP.
 - Know what you want ('the ask'), and be realistic. Back up the issue with support where possible. e.g. 'we'll generate media attention, we'll draft a paper to show how it can work locally'. Watch our video about [Moving politicians to take action](#).
 - Focus on solutions, not just problems.
 - Localise the issue.
 - At meetings, keep it brief and don't overstay your welcome.
 - Personal stories work, but don't let your heart rule your head (don't get angry or overly emotional).
 - Politicians will usually be interested in two things: will your issue be politically popular (a 'vote winner'), and how much will it cost.
 - Don't align yourself to only one party – it's important to give all parties the opportunity to address your issue.
 - Be in it for the long haul, persistence pays.
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MORE INFORMATION

Click on the links below for more information:

[Moving politicians to take action – how to make an 'ask'](#) [Youtube Video]

[Contact List for NSW State MPs](#)

[Contact List for Federal MPs](#)

[10 Tips for Engaging Politicians](#) [PDF]

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