

NSW STATE BUDGET ESTIMATES BRIEFING NOTE

Al Capone didn't go to jail for murder, he went for tax avoidance. The moral is that sometimes we get surprising results from apparently boring, bureaucratic actions.

Parliamentary committees and enquiries can compel people to give answers. Budget Estimates is one of these types of parliamentary enquiries. Using the responses to our questions, across portfolios, we can build up a better picture of the sorry state of NSW, and use that for media and supporter actions.

Here we explain what the NSW Budget Estimates system is, and how you might be able to assist us to lift the lid of the murky world of gambling in NSW.

BACKGROUND

WHAT IS IT?

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/Pages/budget-estimates.aspx>

"Budget Estimates" is the opportunity for NSW Parliamentary Upper House committees to quiz Ministers, public servants and statutory bodies over the performance of their work. It has slipped away from analysis of actual annual budgets and now questions can be asked of nearly anything. It is a key way to probe what is going on, and is best used to elicit specific data or information (obviously, based on information we already have or suspect) to reveal incompetence, missed opportunities, operational quirks and above all, government policy. Occasionally, good work is also highlighted.

There are currently 7 portfolio committees in the Upper House, all chaired by non-government MPs. Each committee calls relevant ministers, their senior public servants, or statutory bodies (eg Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority ILGA), to provide answers related to those portfolio areas. Private citizens or companies are not normally called for questioning – the aim is to explore the workings of government.

Only Upper House MPs (also called Members of the Legislative Chamber aka MLCs) can ask questions, but sessions are open to the public.

The most useful questions seek an answer that can be measured, so not "why does the government do xxxx" but "how often does xxxx occur" or "how much was spent on xxxx". There are no guarantees of useful answers.

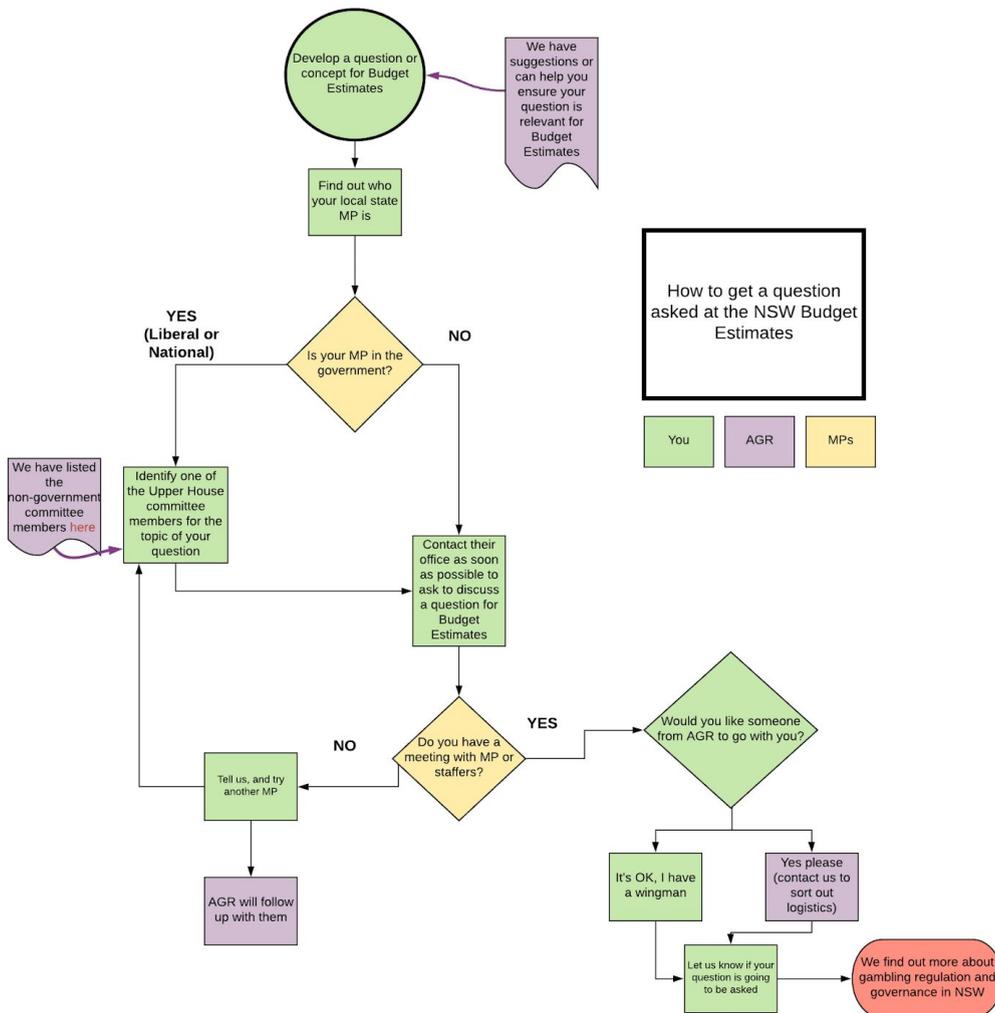
WHEN IS IT?

The 2019 reforms of governance started by the new Upper House have lengthened the questioning times by day and number of days, and from calendar year 2020, sessions will also include questioning in order to have some input into real budget estimates.

There will now be three sets of question time in relation to each budget cycle. The first will be in August/September of each year for 12 days, when the government publishes its estimates. The next will be in October of a year, for supplementary questions, over 5 days. The final set will be in February/March, in the lead up to the next budget, over 12 days.

The timetables are published [here](#), on the parliamentary site.

How CAN I BE INVOLVED?



MPs are keen to be provided with potential questions, including the background into them, so that they and their staff can work out how best to ask the questions. You don't need to have a detailed and specific question, so that just wanting to know, for example, how much money is spent on researching the links between mental health and gambling harm can be enough to get things started.

You can contact our NSW campaigner, Kate da Costa kate.da.costa@agr.org.au for assistance, too.

We are hoping that we can develop a series of questions across portfolio areas – meaning health, police, finance, family violence, housing etc – so that MPs across party lines begin to realise the extent to which gambling impacts on NSW residents. If you have an idea for a question, we can help develop it to a Budget Estimates type question. If you don't have anything in mind, but would like to be part of the process, we have a few question areas already partly prepared, that you might be interested in.