

UP FRONT

# Parliament echoes a nation's grief



With heads bowed in a minute of silence, federal parliamentarians stopped the scheduled business of parliament on Friday 18 July 2014 to honour the victims of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 brought down over eastern Ukraine.

“This is a grim day for our country and it is a grim day for the world,” said Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

“As things stand, this looks less like an accident than a crime.”

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and Deputy Leader of the Australian Greens Adam Bandt supported the Prime Minister’s remarks.

“This is a violation of the rules of civilisation. It is a tyrannical, wild act,” Mr Shorten said.

“Thousands of lives are going to be touched by this tragedy,” Mr Bandt stated.

The House of Representatives then suspended its sitting for a time as a mark of respect.

The following day, the Australian flag atop Parliament House flew at half-mast as a nation mourned the innocent victims. ■

## Parliamentary Budget Office review

Federal parliament’s Public Accounts and Audit Committee has announced a review of the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO).

The PBO was established in 2012 to increase the transparency of the budget process, provide analysis of fiscal policy, and cost policy initiatives, including election commitments.

Public Accounts and Audit Committee Chair, Andrew Southcott (Boothby, SA) said the committee will examine whether the PBO is meeting the objectives for which it was established.

A recent audit report found that the PBO was performing well. The committee will review the report and look more widely at whether the PBO should:

- have statutory information gathering powers, and access to information;
- report on government progress against a new set of fiscal rules (as recommended by the National Commission of Audit); and
- report against medium-term projections of fiscal outlook beyond the forward estimates. ■

**LINKS**

[www.aph.gov.au/jcpaa](http://www.aph.gov.au/jcpaa)

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## Drones report released

New privacy protections may be needed amid a boom in the use of airborne drones in Australia.

Releasing its latest report, the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee was concerned that existing laws do not protect Australians’ privacy from drones.

Among its recommendations, the committee has called for modernised and nationally uniform laws regulating the use of surveillance devices, including drones, as well as an education campaign to inform drone users about privacy and air safety laws.

“Drones will revolutionise some industries, with a wide range of beneficial uses,” said committee chair George Christensen (Dawson,



Qld). “All the same, we must set out clear rules that govern how the police, governments, businesses and members of the public use drones.” ■

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**LINKS**

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## Video reports from delegations

To provide more information on overseas visits by parliamentary delegations, video reports from those delegations are now available from the Australian parliament’s international program webpage at [www.aph.gov.au/international](http://www.aph.gov.au/international) and from the About the House YouTube channel at: [www.youtube.com/athnews](http://www.youtube.com/athnews)

The international program webpage also provides information on the Australian parliament’s activities to support democratic development in our region, including the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program that links together 22 parliaments. ■