

What is a double dissolution anyway, and why are we having one?

On May 8 PM Malcolm Turnbull announced a 'Double Dissolution' and confirmed an election date of July 2 .

This set the wheels in motion for an eight week campaign , expected to cost tax-payers millions of dollars.

What is a 'Double Dissolution'?

A double dissolution is the disbanding of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Basically every Parliamentary seat is up for election. A double dissolution is intended to resolve a stalemate over legislation. It is thought that an election will help re-jig the Houses and Senate so that agreement can be achieved – to pass or not pass the proposed law. For a double dissolution to be called, certain events must occur;

1. The House of Representatives and the Senate must disagree over a proposed bill
2. After at least three months, the bill must be re-presented and passed by the House of Representatives but be again rejected by the Senate (the bill can be rejected, fail to pass or pass with amendments that the House of Representatives don't agree with).
3. A request must be submit by the Prime Minister to the Governor General for approval

According to Political Analyst Dr Harry Phillips, double dissolutions can be used as "an excuse" for an early election.

How much will a Double Dissolution cost?

The 2013 Federal election cost almost \$200 million. So, when we take into consideration all the additional seats and candidates up for election in a double dissolution, and the extended campaign period, we can estimate a cost of almost 1 ½ times that of a normal federal election.

Why did Turnbull call a Double Dissolution?

Turnbull says his reasoning is to resolve disagreement over a bill. The Liberals have been attempting to pass a bill to re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) since 2013, to no avail. In December 2015, after Turnbull's appointment as Prime Minister in September, he announced his intention to re-present the ABCC legislation in 2016. The Double Dissolution trigger was pulled when;

1. Disagreement: In December 2013 the bill was passed by the House of Representatives, but rejected by the Senate in August 2015
2. Continued disagreement after three months or more: In February 2016 the bill passed the Lower House, but was again rejected by the Senate on April 18
3. Prime Minister request: Turnbull sent a written request to the Governor General for approval of a double dissolution if the ABCC bill was not passed by the Senate

Dr Phillips believes that the ABCC bill is just the "political rationale for the double dissolution," and the decision is actually based on taking advantage of Turnbull's high popularity ratings before they fade. Dr Phillips labelled Turnbull's move as "skilful politics", and says election success will allow Turnbull to have his own mandate.

"Without his own mandate, Turnbull has really had to soft peddle the policies he would like to introduce. If he was elected as Prime Minister he would probably feel he could have a lot more stamp on the Liberal party," Dr Phillips said.

The last double dissolution in Australia was called by Bob Hawke in 1987, triggered by disagreement on the Australia Card Bill. After Labor won the election, and had the majority of the Senate, the bill was not re-presented. Dr Phillips believes this double dissolution could follow a similar fate.

What is the ABCC Bill?

The ABCC was a commission created in 2005 to act as a watchdog to the construction industry. In 2012 the Gillard Labor government overhauled the ABCC, making it less authoritative and re-named it the Fair Work Building and Construction (FWBC). When The Coalition came into power in 2013, they introduced two bills into the House of Representatives. One was to abolish the Fair Work Act 2012,

and the other to re-instate the ABCC and its power. These two bills are what we now refer to as the ABCC Bill. The Liberal government is in complete disagreement with Labor and the Greens about the ABCC Bill.

The Liberals say that “the reforms contained in the bill are a necessary and proportionate response to increased militarism and illegality in the construction and building industry”.

While Labor says the ABCC was “excessive, discriminatory, unnecessary and unjustifiable”, and the Greens say the ABCC was “biased in its work as it was driven by an ideological attack on construction workers and unions”.

What will happen next?

The power is in the hands of voters.

New Senate voting laws will make it harder for independent and micro parties to be re-elected in the double dissolution, effectively pushing them out of parliament.

According to Dr Phillips because the double dissolution was a “surprise” it caught politicians off-guard. Many parties are behind on their pre-selections even though the election campaign is already underway, putting them at a disadvantage to Liberal.

Dr Phillips says the chances of Liberal losing are slender because Labor’s primary vote isn’t high enough for them to win. Although, Dr Phillips doesn’t believe that Liberal will have a Senate majority in their own right. “If Liberal loses, Turnbull will lose his Prime Ministership and it will be a tremendous blow to the Coalition, and you will never see the sight of the ABCC bill again,” Dr Phillips said.

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Double Dissolution Timeline

