

HON HARRY WALTER “MICK” GAYFER, AM

Condolence Motion

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [12.03 pm] — without notice: I move —

That this house records its sincere regret at the death of Hon Harry “Mick” Gayfer and tenders its deep sympathy to his family.

I begin by paying my respects to and acknowledging the family present in the Speaker’s gallery today, including Lorraine and Glenda, Mick’s daughters, and their husbands, Will and Anthony; Mick’s grandchildren Taryn, Rohan and Fiona, and their partners, Sean, Sharon and Claude; and his great-grandchildren Ashton, Reece, Lucy, Tamsyn, Caris, Kayla, Declan, Oli and Amelie. On behalf of the government, I pass on our condolences to you all.

Harry, or “Mick” as he was more commonly known, served in both chambers of the Western Australian Parliament throughout his 27 years of service. Elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1962, Mick served as the member for Avon for 12 years, representing a range of towns throughout the wheatbelt. Mick served as the Country Party Whip in this place from 1969 to 1974, before serving in the Legislative Council from 1974 to 1989, including as Leader of the National Party from 1988 to 1989. Reading through Mick’s biography and his contributions to this place, it is clear that he was a passionate representative for his community and regional people more broadly.

Mick was born in London, England, on 12 August 1925 to Harry Gayfer and Sophia Reading. He arrived in Western Australia just a few years later as a small child. Mick received his education at Claremont Practising and Central School, and Scotch College, where he was the head prefect and college captain in 1942. Mick was an able sportsman during his school years. He was a member of his school cricket and football teams and a member of the rowing squad, as well as the lieutenant of his school cadets. Following his schooling years in Perth, Mick returned to his family farm at Corrigin. At the family farm, Coongan Downs, Mick farmed wheat and sheep. In 1948, Mick married Alice Mary Hewett in his hometown of Corrigin. Alice and Mick had three children: Lorraine, Harry and Glenda. Mick was a proud grandfather of eight and great-grandfather of 18.

Mick was a proud advocate for his community, becoming active in both local government and the grains industry. Elected president of the Corrigin Shire Council in 1955, Mick served on the council for seven years, before serving a further 12 years between 1995 and 2007 after his time in this Parliament ended. In total, Mick spent 52 years serving the public in either state or local government, for which he deserved a medal!

Mick was elected as a director of Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd in 1959, becoming chairman of the group in 1971. A stalwart of Western Australia’s grain industry, Mick was chairman of CBH for 25 years. The *Countryman* stated recently that Mick even declined the opportunity to become a minister as he would have had to resign from his role on the CBH board to do so. Mick is credited by many as being the mastermind behind the Kwinana grain terminal, which opened in 1974. The establishment of the Kwinana grain terminal saw Western Australia’s storage capacity increase by tenfold on the old north Fremantle facility, which was at the port in Fremantle. Mick’s advocacy of and contribution towards the construction of the new terminal is widely credited as making Western Australia’s grain industry world class. I drive past the terminal every single day, at least twice. Legend has it that it is the largest single building in the Southern Hemisphere. I have not seen a bigger one, so I assume that is correct!

Mick’s contributions have left a lasting legacy on Western Australia’s grain and farming industries, and his contributions were not left unrecognised. Mick was awarded the Queen’s Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977. In 1991, he was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia. This expanded in 1997, when Mick was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia. In 2003, he was awarded the Centenary of Federation Medal.

Madam Speaker, I would like to conclude by reflecting on the contributions that Mick made in his inaugural speech in 1962. He spoke of the importance of providing good quality services, education and employment opportunities in country and regional Western Australia especially. Mick was right. He lived by those words and he worked hard for his community. It is important that we continue and acknowledge those efforts today.

Vale Mick Gayfer.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [12.09 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Parliamentary National Party and the opposition generally to pay my respects and reflect on the contribution that Hon Harry “Mick” Gayfer made to this Parliament, and public life. I would like to acknowledge his family, some of whom have joined us today, including: his daughters, Lorraine and Glenda, and their husbands, Will and Anthony; granddaughter Taryn, her husband, Sean, and their children, Ashton, Reece and Lucy; grandson Rohan, his wife, Sharon, and their children, Tamsyn, Caris, Kayla and Declan; granddaughter Fiona, her husband, Claude, and their children, Oli and Amelie.

I also acknowledge that just prior to coming in today we were also joined by former members of the Nationals WA who had served with Mick during his time, Hon Hendy Cowan, a former Leader of the National Party and former member for Merredin; Hon Dr Hilda Turnbull, a former member for Collie; and Hon Murray Montgomery, a former member for South West Region who spent some time alongside Mick in both chambers.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 18 August 2021]

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Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Speaker

Mick was born on 12 August 1925 in London and arrived in Western Australia as a child. He was the son of Harry Walter Gayfer and his wife, Sophia Reading. Harry Gayfer was a farmer, housing developer and horsetrader. Mick was educated at Claremont Practising and Central School, and Scotch College where he was head prefect and captain and represented the college in cricket, football and rowing and was a lieutenant in the cadets.

In 1943, he returned home to the farm in Corrigin after completing school to take on the property that was originally selected by his father in 1906. In 1948, he was married in St Matthews Church in Corrigin to Alice Mary Hewett, known affectionately as “Mais” to those who knew her well. This partnership was to last for 73 years. Sadly, Mais passed away just a number of weeks before Mick. She was his number one supporter and it was evident to everyone who knew him that it was a wonderful and devoted partnership.

Mick was elected to the Corrigin shire council in 1955 and served until he was elected to the state Parliament in 1962, including some time as the deputy president. After spending time in this place, he returned to have another go. He was made a freeman of the shire in 1990 and has been held in the highest of regard by his peers and those generations who have followed in his footsteps. Mick’s commitment to his community of Corrigin, to agriculture and civic duty is reflected in the large number of organisations he was a member of and accolades bestowed on him. He was a member of the WA Farmers Federation, a Rotary Paul Harris Fellow, an active Freemason, a life member and former president of the Corrigin Golf Club, a Patron of the Corrigin Agricultural Society and a patron of the Corrigin Football Club. He served as an office bearer in Corrigin sporting clubs, including tennis, football, cricket and golf.

Mick was the CBH Group’s longest standing chairman and a true visionary for the cooperative. He served as a grower director on the board for 37 years, between 1959 and 1996, 25 years of which he served as the chairman. I note comments from former Mukinbudin farmer Allan Watson, who took over as chairman of the cooperative after Mick stepped away, in a recent article published in the *Farm Weekly* following Mick’s passing. Allan said —

“Mick put so much into agriculture in WA and was a true legend of CBH, actually he was a legend of the whole of the Australian grain industry,” ...

“He had a very strong personality, was a great leader, an excellent chairman and such a great contributor to rural Western Australia.

“He was also a bit of a character—he didn’t mind a cold drop on a hot day, he was strong and very knowledgeable, but he always listened and he was a very likeable man who made friends all over Australia through his work in the grain industry.”

Imre Menschelyi, who served as CEO for some of the time Mick was chair, made the following comments —

“To me, he was not only a mentor, but he was CBH for 37 years,” ...

That is certainly how I came to know Mick when I became involved in the National Party and agripolitics. Mick was “Mr CBH”; his reputation as a leader and someone who was held in high esteem preceded him. Imre went on to reflect —

“I was but a junior when Mick was at his heyday as chairman of the board and a visionary for CBH and the grain industry at large.

“Some of the initiatives that he introduced into CBH have left a legacy longer than anyone else and they are still recognised as being very beneficial to the graingrowers of WA.”

As a result of his significant and sustained contribution to the grains industry, Mick was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1991 for services rendered to WA and to the Australian grain trade and community, and was then awarded a Member of the Order of Australia in 1997, in recognition of his service to primary industry. There are few people in the state who can lay claim to making such a significant and enduring contribution to the agricultural sector. The honours that came to him as a result reflect his passion and commitment to the industry and his belief that it would continue to grow and sustain future generations on the land.

All this seems like it might be enough for one lifetime, but Mick was never one to rest on his laurels. In 1962, he decided to throw his hat in the ring for the Country Party for the seat of Avon. According to Mick, the closure of the railways was the theme on which he got elected, because the government closed, or was going to close 842 miles of railway, particularly the railway line from Corrigin to Brookton. In the Nationals’ history book, *Blood Nose Politics*, Mick recalled —

It was that Corrigin to Brookton line and the general closures and the lack of extensions to the comprehensive water scheme, which was introduced by Hawke in 1946 and never completed, that gave me good grounds to stand on... Blood was boiling—no water, railways. They actually took the Brookton railway away and that stirred everybody up.

As the current member representing the communities that formed the seat of Avon and broadly into the wheatbelt, I can attest that 59 years later, those two issues still get the blood boiling in the electorate! His move into politics was

also inextricably linked to his role at CBH, and his vision for the cooperative. In an interview with Ron Chapman in 2012, Mick reflected on this synergy, saying, “I had the spirit of co-operatives in my blood because my father built three of the co-operatives—starting them off in 1917. So it was always instilled in our family”. Mick and former Country Party MP Tom Hart were both trustees of CBH in the 60s at a time when CBH was seeking to locate its prospective bulk grain terminal at Kwinana, rather than at Fremantle. He recalled that both he and Tom decided to stand for Parliament as Country Party candidates as, in his words, “We reckoned we stood more of a chance winning approval for a move to Kwinana by tackling it as members of Parliament.” It was a controversial decision, due to CBH’s non-political stance, but they did win support for the Kwinana option and eventually the new terminal was located at Kwinana.

He held the seat of Avon from 1962 until 1974, representing the Shires of Brookton, York, Beverley, Quairading and Corrigin, together with part of the Shire of Wickpin—namely, the town of Yealering. In his inaugural address, Mick began with a comment on the lack of decentralisation in the state. He said —

Decentralisation is something we have heard bandied about for many years, but we have never seen any practical results come from investigations that have been made into this question. I have heard it said that perhaps the best solution to the problem of decentralisation is to spend the money where it is earned.

This sentiment has been a common thread through generations of our great party, picked up in policies to achieve this end as it sought to achieve greater equity in services and infrastructure for regional communities. It must be something in the water, because 46 years later Corrigin produced another local member who shared those very same sentiments. In speaking with Brendon Grylls, a former member for Merredin and Central Wheatbelt and Leader of the Nationals WA, a former Corrigin boy, to prepare for this today, he reflected —

Mick’s contribution to the Country Party and the Nationals was significant, and I was privileged to follow in his footsteps as a representative for the Wheatbelt. The Nationals had a proud history of strong and visionary leadership and Mick wrote a critical chapter of that history.

As someone who now represents those same communities, and shares the same history of serving in both the Legislative Council and the Assembly, and as someone who knew Mick in his later years, I endorse those comments wholeheartedly. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with Mick and Mais in Corrigin during my time as their local member. Mick was never backward in sharing his views on how the party was travelling, or how gains could be made for the benefit of the agricultural sector and our region. He was as sharp as a tack and even in his 90s with his eyesight failing, he knew exactly what was going on the world of politics. I do not think I once saw him without Mais at his side. In his final speech in the Legislative Council, he said that Mais had worn out five motor cars in 27 years of running around helping him. He thanked his family, acknowledging that when he had started, his children were young and his time away from home meant long periods of separation. We all in this place understand how important family is, and what they sacrifice for us to take on these duties. We thank you for sharing your father, grandfather and great-grandfather with the public of Western Australia and his electorate for such a long time. As we said, Mick spent 27 years in Parliament, 12 in this chamber and 15 in the Legislative Council. Ironically, it was reforms to the Electoral Act to change the weighting of regional representation in the Council that spelt the end to Mick’s career as a parliamentarian. As this house once again prepares to debate electoral reform legislation, it would be wise for members of this place to acquaint themselves with the debates of years past, including the wise words that Mick offered on the impacts of large regional electorates and the ability for the community to remain connected to their representative.

During his time as a member, he worked with and served under six Premiers: Premiers Brand, Tonkin, Court, O’Connor, Burke and Dowding. He was afforded the opportunity to be a minister of the Crown three times, and each time he refused. He remained grounded and committed to serving his electorate, approaching this with vigour and an admirable work ethic. As a farmer himself, the agricultural sector was always at the front of his mind, but his contributions in the house and the Legislative Council reflected his desire to tackle issues like extension to the water scheme, reliable electricity, improved education options and better housing for the wheatbelt. I suspect there were many debates with him roaring at members across this chamber, but in his valedictory speech, he focused very much on the friendships that he made across the aisle and within his own party.

In his 27 years, he served in government and in opposition, and he navigated major changes in our party as we emerged from the Country Party to become the National Party under the leadership of Hon Hendy Cowan. These were very difficult days for the organisation, but in the end Mick saw the value of the vision of a united regional party and he stood proudly as a member of the newly formed National Party. As he exited after 27 years, he spoke of his greatest achievements and disappointments. He reflected on working with John Tonkin to achieve a loan for the state, bringing in \$30 million from overseas to build the Kwinana grain silos and an export terminal. According to Mick, it was the biggest loan that had ever come into Australia. In his words, according to my notes —

That involved a great deal of cooperation and was rather exciting. It was all hush, but these are the sorts of things which Government have to do to make way.

He reflected on his greatest disappointment in not being able to achieve funding or support to complete phase 3 of the comprehensive water scheme, and in not seeing water from the Ord or Fitzroy Rivers harnessed for industrial and community development across the state. He parted with a touch-up for the media of the day, lamenting the fact that important speeches and legislation debated were ignored in favour of, in his words, “a half page article on how a politician hurled invective around the Chamber” in *The West Australian*.

Mick was never one to mince words, and it stood him in good stead with his electorate, the sector that he was so passionate about, and his colleagues. Our electorate, the wheatbelt, rewards members who are fearless in their views, prepared to work hard and be present and accountable. They were well served by Hon Harry “Mick” Gayfer and they rewarded him by re-electing him for 27 years. Our party recognised this effort by bestowing him with life membership.

To his family, of whom he was so immensely proud, the Nationals WA family extend our deepest sympathy. As his busy life slowed, he was able to spend many happy hours listening to the adventures and supporting and encouraging the achievements of his eight grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren. Always at his side was his lifelong companion and number one supporter, Mais.

He finished his final contribution to this place with a few lines from a bush poem published in *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* in 1870, and it seems a fitting way to complete this contribution —

I’ve had my share of pastime, and I’ve done my share of toil,
And life is short—the longest life a span;
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
Or for the wine that maketh glad the heart of man.

For good undone and deeds misspent and resolutions vain,
‘tis somewhat late to tarry. This I know:
I’d live the same life over if I had to live again,
and chances are I’d go where most men go.

Vale, Mick. Both you and Mais will be greatly missed, but your legacy in this state will live on for a long, long time.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [12.23 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Parliamentary Liberal Party to offer my condolences to the family and friends of Hon “Mick” Gayfer. Hon Harry Walter “Mick” Gayfer, AM, was born in 1925 and died at the age of 95 on 15 July, fewer than seven weeks after the passing of his wife, Maisey. He was a respected parliamentary representative of the wheatbelt communities for 27 years, a visionary leader of Western Australia’s grain industry and a tireless servant of his own Corrigin community.

Named after his father, a housing developer, horsetrader and farmer at Corrigin since 1906, Harry Walter Gayfer was born in London in August 1925 and, six weeks later, left for Western Australia with his family. He attended Scotch College from 1939 to 1942 where he was the head prefect, school captain, an all-round sportsman and a lieutenant in the cadets. In 1943, he commenced wheat and sheep farming at the Corrigin family property, Coongan Downs. Like many young farmers, he was precluded from enlistment in the RAAF by wartime manpower controls.

In January 1948, Mick Gayfer married Maisey Hewett, a marriage that would extend for 73 years. He was active in a range of Corrigin sporting clubs, serving as secretary of the tennis and cricket clubs, and as president of the football and golf clubs. He was admitted to the masonic movement, serving the Corrigin Lodge for 70 years. He was first elected to the Corrigin Shire Council in 1955, and, in 1959, commenced 37 years as a director of Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd. Mick Gayfer served as chair of the Great Eastern Ward Road Board Association and became deputy president of the Corrigin shire in 1961. He was chosen as one of two Country Party candidates to contest the district of Avon at the 1962 state election. This seat comprising the shires of York, Beverley, Brookton, Quairading and Corrigin had been held for the Liberal Party since its creation in 1950 by former Country Party MLA James Mann, who had then announced his retirement.

At his first electoral contest, Mick Gayfer polled 1 655 votes, or 36 per cent, 75 votes behind the Liberal candidate and 430 votes clear of his Country Party running mate whose preferences favoured him strongly. Elected with a solid majority of 663 votes, he was re-elected unopposed at both the 1965 and 1968 elections, with the Shire of Bruce Rock now included in the Avon district. From 1969, he served as Country Party Whip in the Legislative Assembly. Between 1962 and 1971, he was director of the Roads Division of the National Safety Council. It is a testament to his popularity in the district of Avon that at the 1971 state election, with the tide running against the Brand coalition government, Avon was one of two seats left uncontested by the Australian Labor Party. Mick gained 75.3 per cent of the vote against an Independent and Democratic Labor Party opposition. It was the strongest result across all seats held by the Liberal and Country Parties. However, at the 1972 redistribution, the district of Avon was split between four other seats, with the York and Beverley shires being included with Northam in a radically redrawn seat that was given the name of Avon. Mick Gayfer was endorsed for the Central Province of the Legislative Council, composed of the districts of Avon, Narrogin and Mount Marshall. At the 1974 state election, he was one of only

two members elected unopposed, commencing 15 additional years of service in the Legislative Council. Despite the then split between the National Country Party and the National Party he was comfortably re-elected in 1980, and again in 1986, leaving Parliament when the Legislative Council was reconstituted on a regional basis for the 1989 election.

Parallel with his outstanding parliamentary career, Mick Gayfer served one of the state's major rural industries through his chairmanship of Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd for 25 years from 1971 until 1996. On more than one occasion, he declined the offer of a ministry so that he could continue as CBH director and chairman to serve the state's grain producers. Thanks to his leadership, the CBH grains terminal was successfully relocated from Fremantle to Kwinana by 1974, securing the tax exemption that made possible the funding of this major infrastructure that immensely increased grains capacity. The Forrestfield grain terminal was substantially planned during his chairmanship, receival points were rationalised and fumigation improved. He had the acumen to not only secure overseas loans, but also negotiate repayments in Australian currency. Over the same 25-year period, he chaired the CBH directors' superannuation fund, greatly appreciated by CBH employees in the era preceding compulsory superannuation. From 1988 until 1993 he was chair of the Bulk Handling Authorities of Australia. He also chaired an international grains conference and was awarded a fellowship of the Australian Grains Institute in 1997, also being made a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

In the voluntary side of community service, Mick Gayfer was a Paul Harris Fellow of Rotary and continued his dedicated involvement in the masonic movement as the twenty-third grand master of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia from 1993 to 1996. He served on the board of governors of Fairbridge Western Australia and chaired its fundraising campaign. His interest in the state's wider rural and regional community included part ownership of a Meekatharra station and chairmanship of Matso's Art Gallery and Broome Brewery in 1997. This wide and generous service was recognised by a Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977, a medal in the Order of Australia in 1991 soon after leaving Parliament, and by the upgrade of his Order of Australia medal to membership of the Order of Australia in 1997. He also received a Centenary of Federation Medal in 2003.

Both in his active career and in semi-retirement, Mick Gayfer remained firmly anchored to the sporting, rural and community life of Corrigin. He was awarded freeman of the municipality of Corrigin in 1990. The Shire of Corrigin has noted with deep appreciation that he returned to a further 15 years' service in 1992, being elected deputy president in 1995 and as shire president from 2001 until 2007.

Hon Ken Wyatt, federal Minister for Indigenous Australians, who arrived in Corrigin aged 12 with his family after 1965, has recalled that his great respect for Mick Gayfer as a local community leader and parliamentarian was a major influence on his decision as a young man to support the free enterprise and the Liberal-conservative side of politics.

Mick Gayfer died in Corrigin after the passing of his wife, Maisey, on 28 May. We extend our deepest condolences to his family and friends. Today I wish to recognise Lorraine and Will Crombie, Mick's daughter and son-in-law; Glenda and Anthony McBeath, Mick's daughter and son-in-law; Taryn and Sean Scadding, and great-grandchildren Tamsyn, Caris, Kayla and Declan Scadding; and granddaughter Fiona and her husband, Claude Marais, and great-grandchildren Oli and Amelie Marais. I also recognise Mick's ex-parliamentary colleagues, Hon Hendy Cowan, Hon Murray Montgomery and Hon Dr Hilda Turnbull, who are also here today.

Mick Gayfer has been an outstanding contributor to the state of Western Australia at every possible level, from his local community to the whole state. I offer my sincere condolences to his family.

Vale Mick Gayfer.

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) [12.31 pm]: Members, I, too, had the opportunity to meet Mick Gayfer on a couple of occasions—one, I think, being the opening of our new Masonic Lodge in Midland. He was clearly a really likeable and accomplished person who made a significant contribution to the state of Western Australia.

Members, I request that you all rise for one minute's silence in order to carry the motion.

Question passed; members and officers standing as a mark of respect.