

GRAHAM “POLLY” FARMER — TRIBUTE

Statement by Minister for Sport and Recreation

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston — Minister for Sport and Recreation) [10.37 am]: I rise today to commemorate the life of Graham “Polly” Farmer, who passed away yesterday at the age of 84. Arguably the greatest AFL player ever, and certainly the first footballer to be named a Member of the Order of the British Empire, Polly Farmer was an absolute legend and a Western Australian icon. Polly was born in North Fremantle, raised at Sister Kate’s orphanage for Indigenous children, and left with a right leg longer than his left leg after a bout of childhood polio, but he did not let any of this stop him becoming one of the greatest footballers of all time. Farmer was not only a fantastic player, but also a truly exceptional innovator, who singlehandedly changed the way the game of AFL is played with his ruckmanship and the handball skills that he developed by handballing balls through car windows at the car yard where he worked. Farmer’s achievements and awards would take far more time to list than I have to speak here, but include being named in the AFL Team of the Century in 1996, as well as making appearances on the same lists for Western Australia, Geelong, West Perth and East Perth; captain of the Indigenous Team of the Century in 2005; and the inaugural Legend in the Australian Football Hall of Fame. Farmer played in five West Australian Football League premierships—three with East Perth and two with West Perth—and a Victorian Football League premiership with the Geelong Cats, and was awarded three Sandover Medals and four Simpson Medals. He ensured that every team he played with between 1956 and 1969 contested the finals. Also, in his time he played a remarkable 393 games.

Of course, I must not forget that he was the namesake of our very own Graham Farmer Freeway, which aptly links West Perth and East Perth, the two football districts for which he played.

Polly was also a proud Noongar man and leader of the Aboriginal community. He paved the way for many Indigenous footballers. He played the game at a time when Indigenous people were denied inclusion in mainstream Australian society and were subject to government control in all aspects of their lives.

As well as in the way Aussie Rules is played, Polly’s legacy will continue through the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation, which was formed to ensure that all Aboriginal Australians have an enriching and successful education and a wide range of career, leadership and life choices. The foundation’s network is already extensive and includes many people who have not only achieved incredible success in their chosen careers, but also become proud, positive role models for their families and communities. That was imagined by Farmer when he formed the foundation in 1994.

Sadly, Polly’s wife of 58 years, Marlene, passed away in 2015. He is survived by their children, Kim, Brett and Dean, and grandchildren. Polly shared his last precious moments with his family. I offer my condolences to the family. Vale, Graham “Polly” Farmer.