



Premiers of WA

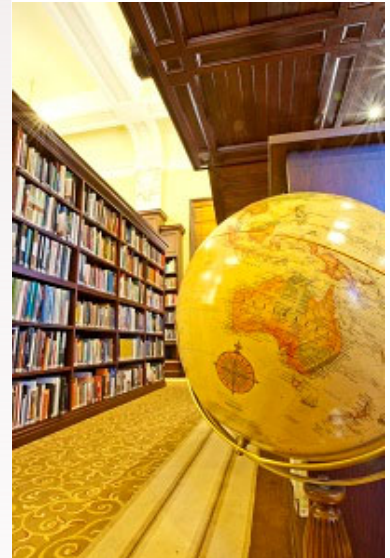
Big John Forrest: First Premier of Western Australia

Sir John Forrest was a surveyor, explorer and Western Australia's first Premier. He was born near Bunbury, Western Australia on 22 August 1847, the fourth child of William and Margaret Forrest. His father was a Scottish miller who migrated to Western Australia in 1842. He was educated at a government school in Picton, near Bunbury and later Bishop Hale's School in Perth. In 1863 he was apprenticed to TC Carey, Government Surveyor in Bunbury and by 1865 he was appointed as a Government Surveyor. At 21 years, John Forrest and his brother, Alexander Forrest as deputy, led an expedition around Lake Barlee and Lake Moore, WA to search for the remains of missing explorer, Leichhardt. In 1876 he was appointed Deputy Surveyor General. In the same year he married Margaret Elvire Hamersley, a member of Perth's elite, at St George's Cathedral in Perth. In January 1883, Forrest became Surveyor General and Commissioner of Crown Lands with a seat in the Legislative and Executive Councils. Forrest was 'Premier' and Colonial Treasurer from 29 December 1890 to 14 February 1901. He was a founding father of the Federation of Australia which involved drafting the Commonwealth constitution. On 30 March 1901 he was elected unopposed to the federal seat of Bunbury which he held until 1918. He held several Cabinet positions including defence, home affairs and treasury. In 1907 Forrest was acting Prime Minister. Due to illness Forrest resigned as Federal Treasurer on 27 March 1918. In February 1918 Forrest was recommended for a barony and in June he sailed to England to take his seat in the House of Lords. He died on board the troopship, *Marathon* off the coast of Sierra Leone on 3 September 1918. He was finally buried at Karrakatta Cemetery in 1919.



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Head & shoulders portrait of John Forrest
Photograph courtesy of
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"We are only on the threshold of prosperity...there is a great Australian nation, and we are part of it. We are destined in the future to dominate these great Southern Seas. We have in this great continent of Australia another Britain—another home for the English speaking race".

John Forrest

Address, Perth Town Hall,

10 January 1896

The Hon Mark McGowan: 30th Premier

"It was a fact of life in the area in which I lived that if one's parents were wealthy, one was afforded opportunities and if they were not, one missed out. It became apparent to me then, as it still is, that it was through the actions of government or representative organisations - for example, the union movement - that ordinary people were afforded opportunities."

Mr McGowan,
(Rockingham)

Inaugural Speech

Hansard

11 March 1997

The Hon Mark McGowan was born in Newcastle, New South Wales on 13 July 1967 to Dennis and Mary McGowan. He was educated at Casino Primary School, Casino High School and Coffs Harbour High School. In 1984, McGowan joined the Australian Labor Party. He studied law at the University of Queensland. In 1987, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and by 1989 he had received a Bachelor of Laws. He also completed a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice at the Queensland University of Technology.

After university, McGowan joined the Royal Australian Navy as a naval officer (legal officer). In 1991, he moved to Western Australia and settled in Rockingham. He became a Rockingham City councillor in 1994 and in 1995 he was elected Deputy Mayor. He was also elected President of the Safety Bay/Rockingham branch and the Brand

Electorate Council of the Australian Labor Party. Mark McGowan married Sarah Miller on 21 December 1996 in Fremantle. They have two sons and one daughter.

On 14 December 1997, McGowan won the Western Australian Legislative Assembly seat of Rockingham. He has been re-elected for every subsequent election in the same seat. His portfolios have included the environment, climate change, education and training, tourism, racing and gaming, youth, disability services, Peel and the South West. McGowan served as Leader of the Opposition from 2012 to 2017. On 17 March 2017, he was sworn into the office of Premier when Labor won a landslide victory at the election. In 2021, he won the 13 March election with a record number of seats. On 19 March 2021, he was sworn in as Treasurer as well as Premier.



"Off to vote: State Labor leader Mark McGowan with wife Sarah and children Samuel, Alexander and Amelia at the Rockingham Senior High School polling station to vote in today's State election."

Picture: Nic Ellis
Photograph courtesy of
Sunday Times
12 March 2017, p. 1

Premier's role: 'first among equals'

The Premier is the Head of Government of the State in Western Australia with executive power that is subject to the advice of the Cabinet. After a general election the Premier is the leader of the party, or coalition of parties, with a majority of the 59 seats in the Legislative Assembly. By convention the Premier is commissioned by the Governor to be the 'first among equals', as the leader of the Ministry or Cabinet, and form government. The Premier resigns if the party loses the support of the majority of the house.



"Sir David Brand (left) and Jeff Newman at the 1973 Telethon at the studios of TVW7, Tuart Hill"

[Sir David Brand was Premier of WA from 1959—1971]

Photograph courtesy of State Library of WA:
BA1119/P2094
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The Premier has ministerial responsibilities and also coordinates the work of other ministers. In Labor governments, the Premier is the leader of the parliamentary party and is chosen by the Caucus (meeting of all elected Labor members). The Premier allocates portfolios to members who are elected to the Ministry by the Caucus. In Liberal and National Party coalitions, the Premier is usually elected by the parliamentary members of the main party in the coalition (Liberal Party). The Premier chooses the Ministry and allocates the portfolios. An agreement between the Liberal and National Parties determines the number of ministerial posts held by each party. The specifics of the Premier's role are:

- lead the government and coordinate administration in the state
- chair Cabinet meetings
- advise Her Majesty the Queen on the exercise of powers and functions of the Governor
- select ministers and allocate portfolios (Liberal and Nationals) or allocate portfolios to ministers chosen by Caucus (Labor)
- set out the principal ministerial responsibilities of ministers and the Acts they will administer (through Executive Council)
- authorise a minister to perform the duties and functions of another minister
- advise the Governor on the opening day of parliamentary sessions and the proroguing of Parliament prior to a general election
- adhere to caretaker government conventions and practices following a general election announcement
- be the main communicator between the Governor and Cabinet, the WA Government and federal, state and territory governments, and between the WA Government and overseas governments
- as a Member of Parliament represent his or her electorate.

Courtesy title

When Western Australia first commenced responsible government in 1890 the word Premier was merely a courtesy title as the position was not recognised constitutionally. However John Forrest adopted the title of Premier when he took office that year. Forrest's actual appointment was Colonial Treasurer.

The Constitution Act and the Constitution Amendment Act provide for appointment of the 'principal executive offices of the Government liable to be vacated on political grounds' but does not mention the executive office of Premier. Until 1917 the ministry lists published in the Government Gazette did not mention the office.

Sir James Mitchell, Lieutenant Governor-in-Council finally formalised the title of Premier on 3 April 1947 by declaring 'the office of Premier, Treasurer, Minister for Housing, Forests and the North-west' as one of the eight 'principle executive offices of the Government'. Mitchell then appointed the Hon Ross McLarty MLA as Premier. Subsequently the office of Premier has been listed as the head of every government of WA.

Premiers of Western Australia

No	Name	Party	Period of Service
1	Sir John Forrest	Forrest	20 December 1890 – 14 February 1901 (10 years, 1 month, 16 days)
2	George Throssell	Forrest	14 February 1901 – 27 May 1901 (3 months, 13 days)
3	George Leake	Opposition	27 May 1901 – 21 November 1901 (5 months, 25 days) 23 December 1901 – 24 June 1902 (6 months, 1 day)
4	Alfred Edward Morgans	Ministerialist	21 November 1901 – 23 December 1901 (1 month, 2 days)
5	Sir Walter Hartwell James	Liberal	1 July 1902 – 10 August 1904 (2 years, 1 month, 9 days)
6	Henry Darglish	Labor Independent Labor from 1905 Liberal from 1908	10 August 1904 – 25 August 1905 (1 year, 15 days)
7	Sir Cornthwaite Hector Rason	Liberal	25 August 1905 – 1 May 1906 (8 months, 6 days)
8	Sir Newton James Moore	Ministerialist	7 May 1906 – 16 September 1910 (4 years, 4 months, 9 days)
9	Frank Wilson	Liberal	16 September 1910 – 7 October 1911 (1 year, 21 days) 27 July 1916 – 28 June 1917 (11 months, 1 day)
10	John Scaddan	Labor Nationalist from 1917 Country Party from 1920 Nationalist from 1923	7 October 1911 – 27 July 1916 (4 years, 9 months, 20 days)
11	Sir Henry Bruce Lefroy	Liberal Country Party from 1920	28 June 1917 – 17 April 1919 (1 year, 9 months, 20 days)
12	Sir Hal Pateshall Colebatch	Liberal (1912-1923) Nationalist (1940-1948)	17 April 1919 – 17 May 1919 (1 month)
13	Sir James Mitchell	Liberal to 1917 Nationalist subsequently	17 May 1919 – 16 April 1924 (4 years, 10 months, 3 days) 24 April 1930 – 24 April 1933 (3 years)

Premiers of Western Australia continued

No	Name	Party	Period of Service
14	Philip Collier	Labor	17 April 1924 – 23 April 1930 (6 years, 6 days) 24 April 1933 – 19 August 1936 (3 years, 3 months, 26 days)
15	John Collings Willcock	Labor	20 August 1936 – 31 July 1945 (8 years, 11 months, 11 days)
16	Frank Joseph Scott Wise	Labor	31 July 1945 – 1 April 1947 (1 year, 8 months, 1 day)
17	Sir Ross McLarty	Nationalist Liberal from 1945	1 April 1947 – 23 February 1953 (5 years, 10 months, 22 days)
18	Albert Redvers George Hawke	Labor	23 February 1953 – 2 April 1959 (6 years, 1 month, 10 days)
19	Sir David Brand	Liberal	2 April 1959 – 3 March 1971 (11 years, 11 months, 1 day)
20	John Trezise Tonkin	Labor	3 March 1971 – 8 April 1974 (3 years, 1 month, 5 days)
21	Sir Charles Walter Michael Court	Liberal	8 April 1974 – 25 January 1982 (7 years, 9 months, 17 days)
22	Raymond James O'Connor	Liberal	25 January 1982 – 25 February 1983 (1 year, 1 month)
23	Brian Thomas Burke	Labor	25 February 1983 – 25 February 1988 (5 years)
24	Peter M'Callum Dowding	Labor	25 February 1988 – 12 February 1990 (1 year, 11 months, 18 days)
25	Dr Carmen Mary Lawrence	Labor	12 February 1990 – 16 February 1993 (3 years, 4 days)
26	Richard Fairfax Court	Liberal	16 February 1993 – 16 February 2001 (8 years)
27	Dr Geoffrey Ian Gallop	Labor	16 February 2001 – 25 January 2006 (4 years, 11 months, 9 days)
28	Alan John Carpenter	Labor	25 January 2006 – 23 September 2008 (2 years, 8 months, 20 days)
29	Colin James Barnett	Liberal	23 September 2008 – 17 March 2017 (8 years, 5 months, 22 days)

Premiers of Western Australia continued

No	Name	Party	Period of Service
30	Mark McGowan	Labor	17 March 2017 – (4 years ongoing)

Facts on Western Australian Premiers

The first Premier of Western Australia was Sir John Forrest, who was Premier from 1890 to 1901.

The youngest Premier in WA when sworn in was John Scaddan, aged 35 years in 1911 .

The only Premier to also be a Governor of Western Australia was Sir James Mitchell.

The longest serving Western Australian Premier was Sir David Brand who served for 11 years, 11 months and one day.

The only father and son Premiers in WA were Sir Charles Court (1974-1982) and Richard Court (1993-2001).

The only Premier to die in office in WA was George Leake who died of pneumonia on 24 June 1902.

The shortest time served by a Premier in WA was one month by Hal Colebatch in 1919. He was also the only Premier to also have been a member of the Legislative Council.

The oldest Premier in WA when sworn in was John Tonkin, aged 69 years in 1971.

The first woman Premier in WA and Australia was Dr Carmen Lawrence from 1990 to 1993.



Premier Frank Wilson [fourth from the right] and others at Government House, Perth [1916-1917]

[The youngest Premier in WA, Hon John Scaddan is sixth from the right.]

Photograph courtesy of State Library of WA: BA533/468 4517B/2

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