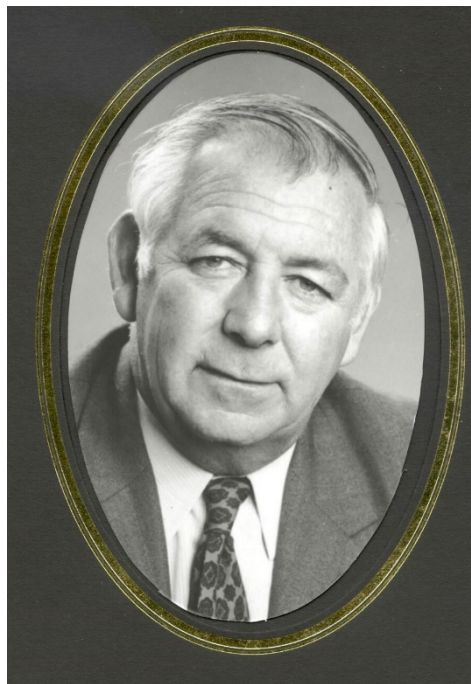




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

HON HARRY WALTER “MICK” GAYFER, AM

Condolence Motion



Legislative Council

Wednesday, 18 August 2021

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 18 August 2021

HON HARRY WALTER “MICK” GAYFER, AM

Condolence Motion

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [1.03 pm]: — without notice: I move —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Harry Gayfer, a former member of the Legislative Council for the Central Province; and places on record its appreciation for his long public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to members of his family in their bereavement.

Can I begin by paying my respects to the family in the public gallery today—Lorraine and Glenda, and their partners and families, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, some of whom I met earlier.

Throughout his 27 years of parliamentary service as the member for Avon in the Legislative Assembly and then the member for Central Province in the Legislative Council, Harry Gayfer, or “Mick” as he was known, was described as a hard worker, courageous, a bit of a character, a strong leader with a strong personality, and a visionary of the Australian grain industry.

Born in Kensington, London, on 12 August 1925, Mick was just six weeks old when he and his parents, Harry and Sophia Gayfer, boarded a ship to embark on the long ocean voyage to emigrate to the land down under. Educated at Claremont Practising and Central School and then Scotch College, he was head prefect and captain in 1942. Like many from regional communities, Mick was actively involved in sports from a young age and represented Scotch College in cricket, football and rowing, and as though head prefect and three sports was not enough to juggle at school, he was also a lieutenant in the cadets.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Mick farmed on his property, Coongan Downs, near the wheatbelt town of Corrigin, a town he would call home for most of his life. In 1948, he married Alice, or “Mais”, and they were together for 73 years before she passed away. Together, they had three children: Lorraine, Harry and Glenda.

His first foray into politics began where it would also end, at the local level, when he was elected to the Corrigin Shire Council in 1955, rising to deputy president between 1961 and 1962. Later in life following his parliamentary career, he was a Shire of Corrigin councillor between 1992 and 2007, including president for the final six of those years.

Meanwhile, his rise in the grain growing industry was bubbling away, and from 1959 he served as a grower-director of Co-operative Bulk Handling LtdC, or CBH, a role that he would keep for 37 years. I will come back to that.

Mick’s love of agripolitics and his fierce advocacy for the grain industry came to head when he was elected as the member for Avon in 1962, and eventually transferred to the upper house as a member for Central Province from 1974. He served as Country Party Whip between 1969 and 1974, and Leader of the National Party in the Legislative Council between 1988 and 1989. He also served on several committees, including the Printing Committee, the Standing Orders Committee, the Joint House Committee, the Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation and the Select Committee inquiring into City Club (Private) Bill 1965.

He was an active member of the Western Australian branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, representing Western Australia at the 1975 general conference in New Delhi and as a member of the branch executive. Although his parliamentary contribution was significant, it was his contribution outside the Parliament that he is remembered for most. His country values and love for the farming community of WA are clearly what drove him, and his parliamentary career was anchored by an overarching mission to improve the grain industry in WA.

Hon Tom Stephens, a former member who served with Mick in this chamber, has made a couple of the observations. This is one of them —

Mick used to drive in from his property each Tuesday morning; he had an air about him of being very much a “hands on” farmer.

He was successful as a farmer and always drove good vehicles—perhaps indicating that his farms had prospered. He would drive his car into the city; and they would regularly arrive at the Parliament covered in the dust or the mud of the bush, a clear indication that Mick was forever out and about, doing his job as either parliamentarian or farmer; or both.

Reprinted from Hansard

As CBH's longest-standing chairman of 25 years, the initiatives driven by Mick during his reign had a significant positive impact on the WA grain growing industry. Mick has been described as a visionary and passionate—so passionate, in fact, that I am told he turned down opportunities to become a minister in order to retain his role on the CBH board.

Mick is best known for securing land and raising the funds to build the Kwinana Grain Terminal. Completed in 1974, it marked the beginning of a new era for the grain industry in WA. Over 40 years old, the facility can still hold more than one million tonnes of grain and is used for the shipping of over half the state's export grain to foreign markets. He also played central roles in a number of innovative initiatives that modernised and advanced the WA grain industry, including the Metro Grain Centre and the rationalising of receival points to improve the efficiency of grain collection points across the state.

In talking on the ABC *Country Hour* recently, former general manager of CBH Ray Delmenico acknowledged that not all the things he was behind were accepted at the time, but, as time went on, it was demonstrated that these were absolutely beneficial. In *Farm Weekly*, another former CBH CEO is reported to have said that some of the initiatives that he introduced into CBH had left a legacy longer than anyone else's and are still recognised as being very beneficial to the grain growers of WA.

Mick's honours list is impressive. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1991; appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1997; awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977; and awarded the Centenary of Federation Medal in 2003. He was made an honorary freeman of the Shire of Corrigin in 1990 for his outstanding community service and was awarded a fellowship of the Australian Grains Institute in 1997.

His list of community involvement is also impressive. He was a member of the Western Australian Farmers Federation and Rotary, a life member of the Corrigin Football Club and the Royal Perth Golf Club, an office bearer in several local Corrigin sporting clubs; a member of the board of governors of Fairbridge Western Australia; a patron to multiple agricultural societies; president of the Western Australian Goland Rowing Club; a patron of the South Perth Bowling Club; a member of the Country Shires Association; and the list goes on.

He is a life member of the National Party, and his service to it and the state of Western Australia is profound.

I will end with some further reflections from Hon Tom Stephens, who said, according to my notes —

Mick was a very pleasant, affable presence around the Parliament; and in the chamber, where he had a commanding deep voice that he could always put to good effect.

Mick was a lively, entertaining, good public speaker.

His contributions to parliamentary debate were robust and based on solid experience that came from his farming background and his involvement with CBH.

As a formidable party political opponent, Mick was a substantial figure; however, he characteristically always performed his various roles with dignity, good grace and in fine humour.

On behalf of the State Parliamentary Labor Party and the government of Western Australia, I pass on our condolences to his family and friends.

Members: Hear, hear!

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [1.11 pm]: I would like to join the Leader of the House in adding the voice of the opposition alliance to the condolence motion today in support of Hon Harry Gayfer, AM, OAM, JP, and acknowledge his daughters, Lorraine and Glenda, who are in the President's gallery today, and his grandchildren.

Mick Gayfer was a visionary leader for the Western Australian grains industry and a dedicated rural representative of both houses of the Western Australian Parliament. Although deeply committed to his local Corrigin community, he represented the 28 shires of the Central Province in this chamber, together with a wide constituency of grain growers and CBH employees.

Born in London in August 1925, Harry Walter—known as “Mick”—Gayfer returned with his family to Corrigin, where his father had established the Coongan Downs wheat and sheep property in 1906. At Scotch College from 1939, he excelled as a sportsman, and left in 1942 as school captain and a lieutenant in the cadets. He was, however, prevented from enlisting in the RAAF by the wartime manpower controls applying to young farmers and thus commenced farming in 1943.

Mick Gayfer entered public life in 1955, aged 30, when he was elected to the Shire of Corrigin. He was an active member and office-bearer of the local football, cricket, tennis and golf clubs and a member of the Country Party and Corrigin Masonic Lodge. In 1959, he became a grower-director of Co-operative Bulk Handling. He was also elected deputy shire president in 1961 and chaired the Great Eastern Ward Road Board Association.

At the 1962 state election, the Country Party sought to recover its traditional seat of Avon Valley, held since 1950 for the Liberal Party by then retiring veteran member James Mann, a seat that has now been renamed Avon. Mick Gayfer was one of two endorsed Country Party candidates and enjoyed a comfortable win against the Liberal Party, which did not trouble to recontest Avon thereafter. As a strong local member covering the Shires of Corrigin, Bruce Rock, Quairading, Brookton, Beverley and York, he was also unopposed by Labor throughout his 12 years in the Legislative Assembly.

He served as Country Party Whip from 1969 to 1974, and in 1971 he commenced a 25-year term as chairman of Co-operative Bulk Handling. The redistribution in 1972 abolished the original district of Avon, even though its name was transferred to a Northam-based seat. Mick Gayfer was then engaged by the Country Party to contest the Central Province for the Legislative Council, which was being vacated by then retiring Legislative Council President, Sir Lesley Diver. Central Province comprised the Legislative Assembly districts of Mount Marshall, Narrogin and the new Avon. At the 1974 state election, with the Country Party renamed the National Alliance—a name we have come back to—Mick Gayfer was elected unopposed for Central Province, a rare distinction now that both the Liberal Party and the Australian Labor Party have adopted the practice of standing candidates in almost all seats. Central Province was the only Legislative Council seat won by the National Alliance in 1974. I note that in serving in dual houses, he joins a select club of people who have started in the lower house and risen to the lofty heights of the Legislative Council, a feat for which he should be commended!

It is likely that Mick Gayfer's achievement of relocating the CBH grains terminal from North Fremantle to Kwinana, with greatly increased capacity, had discouraged electoral competition in 1974. Needing \$42 million, which was an immense sum 50 years ago, CBH had secured the final \$30 million from nine overseas banks, with the far-sighted provision to repay this loan in Australian dollars.

At the conclusion of his six-year term in 1980, he faced competition from the Liberal Party, the Australian Labor Party and the National Party, which had then split from the National–Country Party. Mick Gayfer led with 38.5 per cent of the primary vote, with 73 per cent of preferences from the National Party giving him an absolute majority of 52.2 per cent, or a win of over 900 votes. In other contests in 1980, the National Party had directed preferences to the Liberal Party ahead of the NCP, but not against Mick Gayfer.

In 1986, Central Province consisted of the districts of Avon, Mount Marshall and Merredin, with the Nationals reunited, but with the ALP directing preferences to the Liberal Party, which we do not see very often. Securing a primary vote of 45.5 per cent, Mick gained sufficient Labor preferences to hold the seat, with a final vote of 51.7 per cent. His final term, however, was cut short by the introduction of regional proportional representation, and he did not seek endorsement for the Agricultural Region at the 1989 election. He concluded his term serving as Leader of the National Party in the Legislative Council in 1989. In a valedictory speech on 15 December 1988, he said —

I loved my electorate work. I thought it was really great. When I first started in politics I had six shires but now Hon E.J. Charlton —

A name we know well —

and I have 28 shires in our electorate. I used to pride myself, and tell the young chaps who were coming in to Parliament that if one wanted to get re-elected one had to really farm one's electorate, and get in there and work it. One had to work it as though one were ploughing and cultivating a paddock; one had to keep one's lines straight. Everything had to be right and one could not afford to make one mistake. On the other hand, if one liked doing it, the end result would and did show.

He expressed regret for having passed up the offer of a cabinet position, but this would have necessitated his resignation as a CBH director and chair. He acknowledged that as a member of Parliament, he had worked with the coalition and Labor governments to advance the grains industry. As chairman of CBH, Mick Gayfer was closely involved in the difficult but necessary process of rationalising over 300 grain receival points. The Metro Grain Centre in Forrestfield, which opened in 1988, was substantially planned before his term concluded in 1996. Proud of the fact that CBH had instituted an employee superannuation fund in 1945, he chaired the CBH directors superannuation fund from 1971 to 1996, with 1 000 full-time and 2 000 seasonal employees. He considered that the collegiate spirit of CBH had kept it free from any large-scale industrial action, and former colleagues have paid tribute to his firm hand and to the sense of family that he fostered.

The record of Mick Gayfer is one of outstanding service to his community and the state of Western Australia, and members of the opposition join the government in paying our respects to his family and taking seriously his memory.

Members: Hear, hear!

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [1.19 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Parliamentary National Party to pay my respects and reflect on the contribution that Hon Harry “Mick” Gayfer made to the Western Australian Parliament and public life. Mick was one of those rare individuals, as has been said, who served in both the Legislative Council and that other place that shall not be named.

First, I would like to acknowledge his family, some of whom have joined us today, including daughters, Lorraine and Glenda, and their husbands, Will and Anthony; granddaughter Taryn and husband, Sean, and their children, Ashton, Reece and Lucy; grandson Rohan, and wife, Sharon, and their children, Tamsyn, Caris, Kayla and Declan; and granddaughter Fiona and husband, Claude, and their children, Oli and Amelie.

Mick was born in London on 12 August 1925. He was the son of Harry Walter Gayfer, a farmer, housing developer and horse trader, and his wife, Sophia Reading. Mick came to Western Australia as a child and was educated at Claremont Practising and Central School and Scotch College. He was head prefect and captain at Scotch and represented the college in cricket, football and rowing, and was a lieutenant in the cadets. After completing school in 1943, he returned home to the farm at Corrigin to take on the property that was originally selected by his father in 1906. In 1948, he was married in St Matthew's Church to Alice Mary Hewett, known as Mais. Mais was Mick's number one supporter, and all who knew him had no doubt that it was a wonderful and devoted partnership—a partnership that lasted an amazing 73 years. Sadly, Mais passed away a number of weeks before Mick.

Mick was elected to the Corrigin Shire Council in 1955 and served until 1962 when he was elected to state Parliament. He spent some time as deputy president. He was made a freeman of the shire in 1990 and has been held in the highest regard by his peers and those generations that have followed in his footsteps.

Mick was a member of the Western Australian 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 patron of the Corrigin Football Club. He also served as an office bearer at various Corrigin sporting clubs, including tennis, football, cricket and golf.

Mick's commitment to his community of Corrigin, to agriculture and civic duty is clearly evident in the large number of organisations he was a member of. One of our state's greatest success stories would have to be Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd. CBH, as it is better known, is a large and very important organisation in the state's agricultural industry, and Mick's lengthy and extensive contribution to CBH has no doubt helped shaped that success. Mick was CBH's longest standing chairman and a true visionary for the cooperative. He served as a grower-director on the board for an incredible 37 years, from 1959 to 1996, including 25 years as chairman.

I note comments from former CBH CEO Imre Mencshelyi in a recent article in *The West Australian* following Mick's passing. Mr Mencshelyi said that under Mick's leadership CBH was innovative and progressive. He said —

“We were one of the first to embrace Infratec—a grain quality measure—and he was a great one for mentoring people to achieve objectives.

Mr Mencshelyi said that CBH's move from North Fremantle was an example of Mick's foresight because the old port facility covered only about 10 per cent of Kwinana's capacity. Fremantle simply did not have the ability for increased production. Being prepared to chase overseas loans also paid off, increasing the state's grain handling. The rationalisation of receival points, improved bins, and better fumigation methods were all part of the Gayfer legacy. The Forrestfield grain terminal was another asset opened just after his departure. Most of its planning had happened under his stewardship.

Mr Mencshelyi was also quoted recently in *Farm Weekly* as saying —

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

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 then awarded a Member of the Order of Australia in 1997 in recognition of service to primary industry.

Although all those achievements could fill a lifetime, Mick was never one to sit still. 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 they—the government—closed, or were going to close, 842 miles of railway that did not pay in this country, and particularly the railway line from Corrigin to Brookton. In the National Party's history book, *Blood Nose Politics*, Mick recalled —

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

I am sure my colleagues in this place some 59 years later can attest that those two issues are still boiling away out there in that patch!

Mick's move into politics was also inextricably linked to his role at CBH and vision for the cooperative. In an interview with Ron Chapman in 2012, Mick reflected on this synergy, saying, according to my notes —

“I had the spirit of cooperatives in my blood because my father built three of the cooperatives—started 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 1960s at a time when CBH was seeking the location of its prospective bulk grain terminal at Kwinana rather than Fremantle. He recalled that both he and Tom decided to stand for Parliament as Country Party candidates as, according to my notes —

“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 won support for the Kwinana option and eventually the new terminal was located at Kwinana.

Mick 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 Wickepin and the town of Yealering. Mick spent 27 years in Parliament, 12 in the other place and 15 in the Legislative Council. He was elected as member for Avon on 13 March 1962, and then, in 1974, saw the light and was elected to this place as a member for Central Province, serving until 21 May 1989. In his inaugural address in the other place, Mick began with a comment on the lack of decentralisation in the state. He said —

Decentralisation is something which 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.

He went on further in his address to say —

In all these matters which I have raised the main feature is that country centres should be provided with the amenities which are enjoyed by the people living in the cities. That is not asking for too much. We would be able to induce more people to work in the country if the proper amenities could be provided.

Those sentiments have been a common thread through generations of our great party; picked up in policies to achieve those aims as it seeks to achieve greater equity in services and infrastructure for regional communities.

In his final speech in the Legislative Council, Mick 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 started his children were young and his time away from home meant long periods of separation. All of us in this place understand how important family is, and the sacrifice we make, and that they make, for us to take on these duties. Thank you for sharing your father with his electorate and the public for such a long time.

Ironically, it was reforms made to the Electoral Act to change the weighting of regional representation in the Council that spelled the end to Mick's career as a parliamentarian. As we once again prepare to debate electoral reform legislation, it would be sound advice 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—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 front of mind, but his contributions to the Parliament reflect his desire to tackle issues like extension to the water scheme, reliable electricity, improved education options and better housing. I suspect there were many debates with him roaring at members across the chamber, but in his valedictory speech he focused very much on the friendships made across the floor and within his own party.

In his 27 years, Mick served in government and in opposition and 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. 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 in order to build the Kwinana silos and export terminal. According to Mick, it was the largest loan ever to come into Australia. In his words, according to my notes —

“It involved a great deal of cooperation and was rather exciting. It was all hush-hush, but these are the sorts of things that governments have to do to make way.”

He reflected on his greatest disappointment, which was not being able 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.

Mick parted with a touch-up for the media of the day, lamenting the fact that important speeches on legislation debated were ignored in favour of articles such as a half-page article in *The West Australian* on how a politician hurled invective around the chamber.

Mick was never one to mince words and it stood him in good stead with his electorate, the sector he was so passionate about, and with his colleagues. They were well served by the Hon Harry “Mick” Gayfer and they rewarded him by re-electing him for 27 years. To his family, of whom he was so immensely proud, the Nationals WA family extends its deepest sympathy.

In Mick’s final contribution in this place he said —

It is with great sadness that I leave this place, with its lofty ceilings and hallowed halls. I came here as a young man. I do not claim to be old now ... When I walk these corridors I pause and hear the remarks of the greats of yesteryear.

Mick is one of those greats and it is contributions like his that will echo through the ages in this place. Vale Mick, you and Mais will be missed.

HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [1.30 pm]: I rise to make a very brief contribution on the condolence motion for the life of Hon Harry Gayfer and to pay respects to the Gayfer family. We have heard from other speakers of some of the wonderful and fine achievements of Harry Gayfer—actually, I will stop calling him Harry; I did not even know his name was Harry. For the entirety of my life he was “Mick”, so I will refer to him as Mick Gayfer. We have heard from other speakers about a wonderful lifetime of achievement. I thought I would give members a few personal details. I was a little too young to know Mick, but I knew of him. I grew up in the neighbouring shire and for the most of my childhood, it is fair to say, Mick was as big an institution as *Country Hour* or the Country Women’s Association—37 years at Co-operative Bulk Handling and 27 years in the state Parliament will do that to you, but only if you do a good job; Mick certainly did that. I got to know the Gayfer family a little better through my role as the president of the Shire of Wickham when Mick’s son Harry was the president of the Shire of Corrigin—the apple did not fall far from that tree. Harry obviously got his passion for Corrigin from his father and his family. I saw firsthand how much that family contributed to the Corrigin shire and community.

I will say a little bit about CBH. We should never take for granted what Mick Gayfer and people like him did for this state and our farming community. We are the envy of the world with the storage and handling facilities that those men and women built. Mick Gayfer played an important role in that with his 37 years of contribution to that cooperative, which puts us in a great position now in 2021.

I will tell another quick story about the level of regard held for Mick in that part of the world. In the 1960s, a gentleman I knew called Norm Oates—some members from Corrigin might remember Norm—ran for the Liberal Party against Mick; Norm was quite brave. Afterwards, they held a Liberal Party get-together function to congratulate Norm on his victory, which did not quite work out. There were 10 people in the room. Norm looked them in the eye and said, “I got nine votes today. I want to know who voted for Mick”—that would have been about the mark. That story is probably not entirely true, but Mick got every vote there was to be had in Corrigin and the surrounds.

I would like to pay my respects again to the Gayfer family. Mick was a wonderful servant of the Parliament, the state and the people of Corrigin. If the people of Corrigin had been asked where they would rank him, they would have said it would be fairly close to the top. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT: Members, in putting this motion, I ask that you now rise and stand in your places to indicate your support for the motion and to observe one minute’s silence in memory of the late Hon H.W. “Mick” Gayfer, esteemed former member of this Council.

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