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Editorial

The National Party will celebrate its 90th birthday federally in 2010. It is represented in the Parliament of Australia by nine Members of the House of Representatives and five Senators. How it fights the next election to keep its representation, if not to increase it, is a matter for deep consideration among parliamentarians, the party hierarchy and all those with an interest in its survival.

For this 2009 issue of The Page Review Western Australian MLC Mia Davies outlines how the WA Nationals stood at the 2008 State Election as an independent party and bargained hard with both major parties before forming government with the WA Liberals. The winners are the people of Regional WA who will benefit from Royalties to Regions, the WA Nationals initiative to return 25 per cent of the State's mining and onshore petroleum royalties to projects, infrastructure and community services in regional areas.

In Queensland the Liberal and National parties made the historic move to combine into one, the Liberal National Party, now widely known as the LNP. The result of the Queensland State Election in early 2009 was much closer than anyone anticipated and while there is still some friction about this marriage of the two parties at a State level, parliamentary leader John-Paul Langbroek makes a convincing argument for its continued existence and the opportunities it presents to the conservative side of politics in the Sunshine State.

Federal Nationals Leader Warren Truss gave a stirring speech at the Federal Nationals Council in Canberra in August to rally the troops to the fight towards the next election. The party unveiled its new look and its new approach at the Federal Council. The Nationals are the party for regional Australia. There are 7 million Australians, or about one-third of the population, living outside the major population centres. That's a lot of people who need people who live and work in the regions who can best represent their interests in Canberra.

With such a significant anniversary looming it is important that we can learn from the lessons of the past. The Page Research Centre has an ambitious project to create a national resource for historical researchers and party members.

The Page Research Centre Library project has two strands. The first is the acquisition of original archives and the second is the creation of virtual, online resources on the Page Research Centre website, with details of party and related private archives held in the Page Research Centre Library as well as in other archival repositories and manuscript libraries throughout Australia.

Margot Date, Editor



From Sceptic to Convert John-Paul Langbroek MP, Leader of the LNP

I readily admit that when the issue was first mooted that the former Liberal Party and former Nationals in Queensland should merge into one party, I was a sceptic. But now I am a convert; convinced that the model we have created in Queensland will, in time, become a nationwide model.

On 5 September 1944 that great uniter of conservative politics, Sir Robert Menzies, wrote a letter about his plan for a single non-Labor force in Australia:

“I am now able to get out invitations to all non-Labour bodies to attend a conference in Canberra in about a month’s time to have a shot at setting up an Australia-wide organisation”, wrote Menzies, before he added in brackets “other than the country party with which we can always negotiate later on”.

More than 60 years later and 1200 kilometres away from Canberra, we completed that vision of unity, at least here in Queensland, when the rank and file memberships of both former parties formed the LNP.

It is beholden on each party member and on each Member of Parliament to constantly search for the best possible way they can represent and deliver for their constituents. In Queensland, we obviously believed the best way to represent and deliver for our constituents was to be in government. So it was that we embarked on, and embraced, the rollercoaster ride towards uniting the two parties.

The offer by the Page Research Centre to contribute an analysis on the formation of the LNP and its progress is a welcome one and of course, in some ways, an ironic one. The relationship between Sir Earle Page and Sir Robert Menzies was a notoriously icy one that led to Page refusing to serve in the Menzies Cabinet; but it was an icy relationship that was patched-up for the greater good when Australia went to war and Page returned as a Cabinet Minister under Prime Minister Menzies.

It is that theme of “unity for the greater good” that I want to explore as I take readers through the rollercoaster ride that led to the formation of the LNP and delivered our side of politics its greatest electoral result in almost 15 years in Queensland.

To buck convention however, I won’t start at the beginning of the merger story. Instead, let us fast forward to this year’s State Election in Queensland and the herculean task that confronted the non-Labor side of politics in this state.

To form a one seat parliamentary majority, the LNP needed to secure 23 seats from Labor and achieve a state-wide swing of 7.6%; a considerable challenge by any political measure that defied all the odds.

To put that in perspective, 23 seats is coincidentally the same number of seats that Kevin Rudd



and Labor won in their landslide 2007 federal election result. But Rudd had a 150 seat parliament to find his 23 seats, whereas in Queensland the LNP needed to find 23 seats in an 89 seat parliament.

It is important to understand from just how far behind the LNP was coming; and it is important to understand just how depleted the parliamentary stocks of the former National and Liberal parties were. During the state election campaign, for the first time in more than 10 years, opinion polls were showing the race almost neck and neck between the LNP and Labor; and one of our greatest challenges became managing people's expectations: the public, the pundits, the media and the membership.

On election night, the LNP under the leadership of Lawrence Springborg secured 49.5% of the two-party vote: which along with the primary vote was the highest result for non-Labor in almost 15 years.

On the popular vote we fell just short of government, but for a party just eight months old our gains were significant, particularly in metropolitan and south-east Queensland, and our credibility as a legitimate political alternative was re-established.

Some pundits had claimed the LNP would not sail in the urbanised south-east of the state. Yet the party's greatest swings occurred in Brisbane along with the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. Indeed, of the eleven extra seats the LNP won, ten were in the urban centres of south-east Queensland. (NB. The eleven seats is based on the notional seat count following an electoral redistribution).

- State-wide swing to the LNP was 4.4 %
- Brisbane-wide swing to the LNP was 5.2%
- Gold Coast swing to the LNP was 5.41%
- Sunshine Coast swing to the LNP was 5.8%

Disturbingly however, a curious electoral system in this state delivered the LNP just 38% of the seats despite achieving just short of 50% of the state-wide vote.

As an historical footnote, readers would be aware that Queensland's electoral system under former Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was universally mocked as a 'gerrymander' and became the subject of much scrutiny and derision during the famous Fitzgerald Inquiry into corruption.

At that time, the Labor State Opposition held 33% of the seats after securing 43.5% of the two-party vote. Today, the LNP State Opposition holds 38% of the seats after securing just short of 49.5% of the two-party vote... a greater discrepancy than existed during the 'gerrymander'. Is it not strange that there is not so much as a whisper of complaint from the columnists and political commentators who once loudly condemned the electoral system under Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen? At the time, Tony Fitzgerald observed:

"The concerns which are most often stated focus broadly upon electoral boundaries, which are seen as distorted in favour of the present Government, so as to allow it to retain power with minority support."



I don't recount this as some sort of exercise in historical analysis. Rather I recount this to outline what the *LNP's* next major obstacle to government will be. While the *LNP* must be, and will be, at the forefront of policy initiative and development, our greatest hurdle at the next State Election scheduled for 2012 is the distorted electoral system. Labor can hold office with minority support.

At the next election, based on the electoral pendulum, the *LNP* must secure a state-wide vote of more than 53% simply to hold a one seat majority: it's a mathematical fact so far overlooked by political commentators in this state.

But defying the odds is something the *LNP* is not new to. The whole creation of the *LNP*, its very existence, defied the odds and overcame decades of antagonism between the two former parties in this state... antagonisms and rivalries that played straight into the hands of a Labor Party rubbing its hands with glee.

The *LNP* wasn't just formed at the demand of rank and file members; it was formed at the demand of Queenslanders everywhere looking for an alternative to almost 20 uninterrupted years of Labor Government in this state.

I remember well when I entered State Parliament in 2004 and took my place amongst a total of five, yes five, Liberal Party MPs in an 89 seat parliament. We were out-numbered by the six independents. I could sarcastically tell you how delirious we all were at having increased our parliamentary numbers by two-thirds on the previous parliament, when the Liberals were represented by just three MPs.

As I took my seat I looked at the benches in front of me and saw The Nationals who held another 15 seats in parliament; they too had increased their numbers.

And on the opposite side of the chamber was a beaming, grinning, smirking, jolly Peter Beattie and his Labor Government which populated our chamber with 63 MPs: it is, believe me, a nauseating sight to see a Labor Party occupying 70% of all the seats in a parliamentary chamber.

But The Nationals and Liberal Party, who between them held 20 seats to Labor's 63 seats, were not even in a coalition.

I remember this time well because the Leader of The Nationals, and therefore the Leader of the Opposition, was a young man called Lawrence Springborg who kept talking about merging the parties. Even if the idea had merit, it would surely be impossible to achieve?

Within a month or so, news reports were telling us that Lawrence Springborg was in Toronto and attending the first conference of Canada's new Conservative Party; it had been created, we were learning, by recently uniting two one-time warring conservative parties called the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party. One newspaper story even carried a photo of Lawrence Springborg in discussion with the party's just elected first leader, one Stephen Harper, who had the lofty ambition of being the Prime Minister of Canada after almost one and half decades of the conservatives being in opposition.



Few people realise that the roadmap that eventually achieved conservative unity in Queensland was modelled, almost in its entirety, on the steps used in the road-map to achieve conservative unity in Canada.

Lawrence Springborg was always adamant that if rank and file members got a say on the merger, then it would happen and happen with overwhelming support. He had learnt from the Canadian experience that if a decision to merge was left exclusively in the hands of party apparatchiks, then those trying to protect their own personal positions or fiefdoms, would likely thwart any hope.

In Canada, the merger had been put to rank and file members in a ballot. As a result, 95.9% of the members of the Canadian Alliance supported a merger while 90.4% of members of the Progressive Conservative Party supported a merger.

Lawrence Springborg insisted similarly overwhelming levels of support would materialise from the rank and file membership of The Nationals and the Liberal Party in Queensland if they were only given a chance. He would be proven right; but that was another four years away yet.

His 2004 attempt to merge the parties, like that put forward more than a decade earlier by then Nationals Leader Rob Borbidge and then Liberal Leader Joan Sheldon, didn't get off the ground. With the state leader of the Liberal Party and the Liberal executive opposed to even a coalition at the time, let alone a merger, it was always an uphill battle. "What would you call the party?", "What about policy differences?" was the repeated rhetoric from those opposed.

Lawrence Springborg insisted it wasn't what you called the party that mattered, it was what it did. "Squabbles over three-cornered contests would be consigned to history if there was one united party" advocated merger supporters. The so-called policy differences between Liberals and Nationals were more about geographical differences than philosophical differences.

Take the never-ending daylight saving debate: Liberals in regional Queensland such as Warren Entsch, Ian Macfarlane and Senator Ian McDonald were as opposed to daylight saving as Nationals from regional areas. It was the same for other so-called policy differences: geographical not philosophical.

While the 2004 attempt to merge the parties failed, the extensive coverage of the concept and the obvious public and corporate support for merger, either as an outcome or to be properly canvassed, had firmly put the issue on Queensland's political agenda. It simply would not go away.

Almost two years later, merger again was put on the table. This time it also had the support of State Liberal Leader Bob Quinn and was backed by State Liberal President Warwick Parer and State Nationals President and MP Bruce Scott. But opposition from John Howard and his then Deputy Prime Minister and Nationals Leader, Mark Vaile, made the federal ramifications of a merger too hard and too complicated to deal with. For example, when they got to Canberra, in which party room would the federal members of this new united party sit? How would that impact on the coalition formulas used to allocate positions between Liberal and Nationals MPs in Canberra?



Prior to the 2006 State Election a coalition was again hastily formed and the two parties had performed spectacularly in three by-elections: winning each from the Labor Party.

However, in the longer run, the public bickering over policy differences and which party should field a candidate in which seat, always cast a long questioning shadow over the credibility of a possible future coalition government.

On the 9 September 2006, Peter Beattie confidently strutted into the Governor's residence and asked for a State Election; he walked out with even more confidence; and he campaigned with even more confidence than that.

Within hours of the election being called, the "united" coalition couldn't even agree which of the Liberals or the Nationals would provide the Premier of Queensland if the coalition was elected: perhaps it was all semantics given there were just 5 Liberals and 15 Nationals that between them were 25 seats away from government. With that issue unresolved, no amount of good policy and no number of quality candidates was going to get us across the line.

To be frank, we were hammered. Queenslanders had been demanding change and demanding better than Labor was offering, but we let them down. Quality candidates that had been recruited were let down. Our branch members and donors were left deflated. Each of the Liberal and National parties limped back into parliament with just one extra seat each.

Lawrence Springborg stood down and went to the backbench until the end of January 2008 when he returned and embarked on a reform and transformation of conservative politics at what can only be described as being at a supersonic rate. On reflection, it's hard to believe the two parties were merged into the LNP within just six months of his return to The Nationals leadership. He had resumed the leadership on a mandate to work ceaselessly to merge the parties and it was obvious to all that he had the support of his party's executive.

The eight Liberal MPs too were looking for a "new way" to rebuild the electorate's confidence in them: we had not long ago been holed up in a hotel room for three days trying to resolve a four-all tie in a ballot for Liberal Leader. The media's amusement was exacerbated and fed when it was learnt that Monty Python's Eric Idle was staying in the same hotel and helpfully called his own press conference to announce he was prepared to lead the Liberal Party in Queensland.

Support for a merger was now reaching a rapid pace. Terry White, one-time Queensland Liberal Leader turned successful chemist franchisee, backed the merger. His support was telling: it was while Terry White was Liberal leader alongside Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen as Nationals leader that the coalition agreement was famously torn up in 1983; with The Nationals going on to win government in their own right. If Terry White was backing a merger with the Nationals, thought many, then no one else had an excuse to harbour old grudges.

At first the State President of The Nationals, Bruce McIver, had agreed to give rank and file members a say, through postal ballot, on whether or not they supported the concept of a merger with the Liberal Party. The proposal was met with an incredible 94% support amongst Nationals.



Months later the new President of the Liberal Party, Gary Spence, also issued ballot papers to the rank and file membership of the Liberal Party. By now a draft constitution had been agreed and special transitional provisions, with a sunset clause, had been agreed along with a platform outlining the principles of a new and merged party.

It was now getting down to tin tacks.

Like Canada, there was a need to settle the nerves of sitting MPs at a state and federal level who feared they could be “rolled” at pre-selections with an influx of “new” members that resulted from a combined membership. The Canadian model of a one-off “grandfathering” for MPs at the forthcoming state and federal elections was introduced.

Constitutional provisions to stamp out unsavoury activities such as “branch-stacking” were introduced with the concurrence of the federal Presidents of the Liberal and National Parties.

In a state where separate Senate tickets had become the norm, that too was resolved so that a former Liberal (George Brandis based on Shadow Cabinet seniority) took the first position followed by a former National (Barnaby Joyce) in the second position.

Members of the House of Representatives, although all members of the LNP, would choose which party room they sat in while in Canberra; ensuring the balance between the Liberals and Nationals at a federal level was not disturbed.

With a bit of historical luck, the way the federal Liberal and National parties had been constituted allowed the LNP’s affiliation to be easily handled in the new constitution. The Liberal Party exists at a federal level and has state branches, while the Nationals work in reverse and exist as separate parties at a state level and affiliate together to create the federal party. Consequently, the LNP’s constitution mirrors what both former parties were: the LNP is the state branch of the federal Liberal Party while also being affiliated to the federal Nationals.

With one party in State Parliament, it was agreed that the Leader of the former Nationals (Springborg) and the Leader of the former Liberals (Mark McArdle) would become Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

A similar model was put in place for the election of the first President of the LNP. If a former Liberal was elected President then a person from the ranks of the former Nationals must be elected Vice-President, and vice-versa.

Independent audits of each party’s assets and liabilities were conducted and mechanisms needed to be put in place to combine the assets and various trust funds.

It seems so easy to quickly jot down the process. In truth each step was a painstaking and gruelling task of backwards and forwards negotiation at both a state and federal level and at a parliamentary and organisational level. It takes just two seconds to write the words “a draft constitution was written” ... it seems so flippant when measured against the countless hours of work from countless individuals.



While all this was unfolding, the mood in the state parliamentary chamber was changing. When Springborg returned to the opposition leadership he found himself looking across at a new Premier, Anna Bligh, who had been bequeathed the title by Peter Beattie who had since received one of Labor's famous "merit-based" appointments as Queensland Trade Commissioner to Los Angeles.

When Springborg returned to the leadership, Labor used every parliamentary opportunity to insist that the merger would be a test of his leadership: if he failed he should stand down. Given the past failures to get a merger off the ground, Bligh and Labor thought they were on safe territory.

With the Nationals rank and file members already having voted for a merger and with ballot papers now in the mailboxes of rank and file Liberal members, the Labor government's rhetoric was changing. It was no longer a test of Springborg's leadership, but each day was an alternative attack. One day it was "The Nationals selling out to the Liberals", and the next "The Nationals taking over the Liberals".

It wasn't long before the results of the ballot of the Liberal Party's rank and file was announced. This was to be a test. High profile members such as former Howard Minister Mal Brough, who was now State President, had been arguing to stall or reconsider the whole merger; even writing to all branch members before the deadline to return their ballot papers.

What was the result? 86% support amongst Liberal members for a merger with The Nationals in Queensland.

It now seemed inevitable. A date had been set for the last weekend in July when both parties would hold concurrent annual conventions in rooms beside each other at the Sofitel Hotel in Brisbane. If the concurrent conventions passed the changes to each of their respective constitutions to facilitate a merger, then the wall between the two rooms would come down a new and united party born.

As I said in the beginning; this would be a rollercoaster ride. In between ballot papers being sent out and ballot papers being returned, a new state executive of the Liberal Party had come into being.

Just days before the concurrent conventions were to be held, the Liberal state executive narrowly voted to call off its convention. There was audible uproar from branch members everywhere. Even those who opposed a merger felt uncomfortable about a state executive overriding such a decisive and overwhelming rank and file ballot result. Popular Liberal Lord Mayor, Campbell Newman, hit the radio airwaves urging branch members to arrive at the hotel anyway, and to form a quorum so the convention could go ahead.

At the same time, the decision of the Liberal state executive to call off the convention was now being challenged in the Supreme Court with just one day to go before the merger was supposed to have taken place. The tension, the nerves, the angst was everywhere. When that court decision was handed down to say the state executive had erred in law and could not call off the convention, the merger of the two parties was now just a formality.



Over a thousand delegates arrived the following morning and several hours later the walls between the two now former parties came down: Nationals and Liberals united into the LNP. The next day the party was formally launched to great fanfare... nearly 1500 members attended... the diversity of seeing that beaming icon of The Nationals, Doug Anthony, alongside former Liberal Lord Mayor Sally-Anne Atkinson... of seeing former Nationals Premiers Russell Cooper and Rob Borbidge alongside Lord Mayor Campbell Newman.

In politics, elections come and go. They are won and they are lost. But it is only once in a generation that fundamental structural reform is undertaken. Lawrence Springborg's task of convincing the majority of his own party members to support a merger was a formidable one; but just imagine the task it was to also convince the majority of members in another political party. That's what he did, and it's a great source of strength to me that Lawrence now holds the position of Deputy Leader.

It is a great honour for me to lead Australia's newest and most progressive party. Without a merger, I couldn't have contested the leadership after the 2008 election ... indeed two of the three contenders couldn't have contested the leadership because we would not have been in the official opposition party.

And the fact that I have been elected leader of the LNP is proof positive that no one votes along old party lines: that's a mighty strong framework for the LNP as we work to secure the remaining seats to form government in Queensland.

Unity for the greater good is what we have achieved in Queensland. In time, I'm sure many other sceptics will also become converts.



Preserving the Party's Past: the Page Research Centre Library Project

Don Boadle

The Page Research Centre has embarked on an ambitious project to create a national resource for historical researchers and party members interested in the past, present and future of the National Party of Australia.

There are two strands to the Page Research Centre Library project.

The first strand is the acquisition of actual, physical collections of original archives from both party organisations and individuals associated with the party.

The second strand is the creation of virtual, online resources on the Page Research Centre website, with details of party and related private (sometimes called “personal”) archives held in the Page Research Centre Library as well as in other archival repositories and manuscript libraries throughout Australia.

Already the project has exceeded expectations, with the Page Research Centre Library receiving big accessions of organisational archives from the Federal Secretariat at John McEwen House in Canberra, the Victorian Central Office in Melbourne, the New South Wales Head Office in Sydney, and the Parliamentary National Party of New South Wales, as well as smaller accessions of private archives from several former senators and members.

Some idea of the project's scale can be gleaned from the fact that the Federal Secretariat's archives fill four pallets and weigh over a tonne!

Project scope

The project commenced just prior to the last Federal election; in December 2007 we began writing to retired and retiring parliamentary members, and during January and February 2008 we made our first approaches to party officials.

Identification of the party's organisational records is reasonably straightforward. But the private records of parliamentarians are more complicated. For the purposes of the Page Research Centre Library Project, we have defined private archives as records of non-governmental provenance. They are records created and maintained by, or on behalf of, individual members of parliament. They are sometimes described as “personal archives” to distinguish them from official records created and maintained during the tenure of ministerial office.

However, private records of parliamentarians frequently include not only personal records, but family, business and professional records; the precise mix varying from individual to individual. The largest deposits of private records derive from members' constituency offices, party office-holding, activities as shadow ministers, involvement in lobby or interest groups, and conduct of business enterprises (typically family pastoral companies or small businesses).



The range of formats is consequently diverse, embracing subject and correspondence files, engagement books (but rarely diaries), drafts of speeches and articles, reports, media releases, newspaper cuttings, photographs, audio and video recordings, ephemera (such as invitations, programs and pamphlets), and in some instances personal websites (which already are selectively archived by the National Library of Australia's PANDORA project in collaboration with state and territory libraries).

Because of our interest in identifying all extant archival holdings for our project's second strand, we not only solicited deposits of archives for the Page Research Centre Library, but asked party members to advise us if they had already lodged (or arranged to lodge) their archives in another repository. A number of respondents helpfully did so and relevant details have been incorporated in our online resources.

Distributed custody of private records is very common in Australia. Sir Earle Page is perhaps exceptional because of the sheer quantity of records he accumulated during a 42 year parliamentary career, but the distribution of his records between the National Library of Australia, the National Archives of Australia, the Australian War Memorial and the University of New England and Regional Archives is entirely characteristic of a long-serving member who enjoyed extended periods of high ministerial office.

Housing the Library

The Page Research Centre has been fortunate in negotiating a most favourable, cost-efficient arrangement with the Charles Sturt University Regional Archives to house and provide researcher access to the Library's physical resources.

CSU Regional Archives is a State Records-approved regional repository with a modern, secure, climate controlled building in central Wagga Wagga, managed by a staff of professional archivists. It has been operating since 1973.

The Regional Archives is both an institutional, in-house repository for Charles Sturt University's own records, and a collecting archive that acquires archives with research value from individuals and organisations in the State Survey and Planning Regions of Riverina and Murray.

There thus are important synergies between the holdings of the Page Research Centre Library and those of its hosts. In its own right, CSU Regional Archives has acquired archives from a number of Nationals branches within its two collecting regions and from the following Nationals members of State and Federal Parliaments: Ian Armstrong, Tom Bull, Tim Fischer, George Freudenstein, Charles Hardy, Noel Hicks, W.W. Killen, Joe Lawson, Stephen Lusher, J.A. Pettit, Jim Small, John W. Sullivan and J.H. Taylor.

Arranging and describing its holdings

It is one thing to take in archival accessions and another to prepare them for access by researchers, especially when the workforce comprises two part-timers. Nevertheless, June Dietrich and I have so far fully processed accessions from the Victorian Central Office, the NSW Head Office and the NSW Parliamentary Party. We have also processed smaller deposits



of private archives from Laurie Neal (Senator for Victoria, 1980-81; Victorian State President, 1986-88) and Bern Kilgariff (National Party Senator for the Northern Territory, 1975-79) and prepared a draft accession list for a first consignment of private archives from David Brownhill (Senator for NSW, 1984-2000; Chairman, NSW Party, 1983-86).

We originally proposed adopting the Australian Series System (as used by the National Archives) to maintain intellectual control over accessions. But when the Library concluded its arrangement with CSU Regional Archives, we decided it was more sensible to make use of the Regional Archives' ArchFind database, which manages holdings by record group (the system used by the National Library). In reaching this decision we were conscious of the more labour-intensive documentation required for the Australian Series System, and recognised that there were considerable cost benefits in using the Regional Archives existing database, which facilitates easier location and retrieval of items by search room staff, and is fully supported by the University's Division of Information Technology.

Accession lists for the Library's holdings can be consulted on the Page Research Centre Library's website. Go to www.page.org.au, click on the Library tab, then click on Library Holdings.

Details about access arrangements for those wishing to consult the archives are also on the Library's website. In some cases there are no restrictions on use; in other cases permission is required for some series or the entire record group. Intending users are advised to follow directions and contact the appropriate agency or individual in advance of their visit.

Preservation measures

During processing we are implementing some basic preservation measures to help ensure the survival of the party's archives for future generations. These involve removing staples and other metal fastenings from files and bundles, reformatting thermal faxes, wet process photocopies and deteriorating news cuttings by copying them onto alkaline-buffered ("acid-free") paper, storing fragile or damaged items in acid-free wrappers, and boxing files in acid-free "type 1" containers.

In cases where a major item is seriously damaged or particularly vulnerable we are committed to preservation microfilming. What we believe to be the earliest extant party room minute book from the NSW Country Party (for the period 1932-1950) has now been microfilmed in Sydney by Messrs Pascoe and a viewing copy, rather than the fragile original, is available for use by researchers at CSU Regional Archives.

We have stored photographs in the NSW Head Office and Parliamentary Party accessions in Albox polypropylene sleeves and archival binders and – because the quantities are small – have prepared listings. But the much larger numbers of photographs and audio-visual resources in the Victorian Central Office and Federal Secretariat accessions are as yet unlisted.

Victorian Central Office archives

The largest accession processed to date comprises the archives of the party's Victorian Central Office (PG2694). These cover the period 1919-1996, although Annual Conference business



papers are held up to 2005. The accession's 90 record series are housed in some 53 type 1 boxes, 1 oversized box, and six volumes which total 10.34 linear metres.

The Victorian archives are outstanding in terms of their extent, completeness and inclusiveness.

The Victorian National Party can trace its origins to the Victorian Farmers' Union (VFU), which was established in 1916. The VFU drew its most militant and enthusiastic support from farmers in the marginal wheat lands of the state's Mallee region and already boasted 130 branches and 2836 members by the time the union held its first conference in 1916.

The VFU was the most highly organised of the state farmers' organisations and secured the return of four of its candidates at the 1917 Victorian state election. At the 1920 state election it increased its representation to 13 members in the 65-member Legislative Assembly. The introduction of preferential voting meanwhile assisted the VFU to return its first member of the House of Representatives following its candidate's success at the Corangamite by-election in December 1919.

The VFU suffered a major setback in 1925 when radical Mallee wheat farmers seceded and established the Primary Producers' Union (PPU). The following year the PPU announced that its Country Progressive Party (CPP) aimed to contest all constituencies on the Northern Wheat Belt at the 1927 Victorian state election. The VFU responded in March 1927 by renaming itself the Victorian Country Party (VCP) and broadening its membership that hitherto had been restricted to primary producers.

At the 1927 state election four CPP candidates were returned, at least one of them with Labor Party preferences. The VCP's representation was reduced to ten members. A merger of the two parties was gradually effected during the period May 1927 to September 1930. At the special 'Unity Conference' of the VCP and the CPP on 23 September 1930, it was proposed that the new amalgamated party be known as the United Country Party (UCP), and it styled itself in this way during the period 1931-47.

The Central Office records for this period include not only those of the VFU, the VCP and the UCP, but those of the PPU and the CPP as well. Central Council minutes are held for the period 1923-1996; Management Committee minutes are held for the period 1984-1996; and there are extensive runs of miscellaneous and ad hoc committee minutes. Annotated conference business papers and conference minutes variously cover the period 1919-2005.

A noteworthy feature of the Victorian records is their documentation of the party's Women's Section. From the outset both men and women were eligible for full membership of branches in the so-called "General Section" of the VFU. A separate Women's Section was established in 1918, with its own Central Executive, and its own Annual Conference. The Women's Section secured a large membership across many active branches and there are continuous runs of central, as well as branch, records. The Victorian Women's Section was also much larger and more enduring than the Women's Auxiliaries in NSW. Yet, curiously, the Women's Section has gone unstudied by historians. Its records offer lots of possibilities for dissertations or theses.



Even more surprisingly, the National Party of Australia – Victoria (as it has been known since July 1975) has not so far received book length analysis. Bruce Graham was given access to the Victorian party's records and wrote about its formative years in his monograph, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, (Canberra, 1966), but there is no comparable history to those of the party's NSW counterpart by Ulrich Ellis (1958), Don Aitkin (1972) and, most recently, Paul Davey (2006).

Correspondence in the Victorian party archives reveals that in 1953 the General Secretary approached Ellis to undertake a Victorian party history, but a reluctant Ellis responded that he was already heavily committed with public relations and advisory work on behalf of the NSW party and with the researching and writing of his NSW (1958) and Federal (1963) party histories.

NSW party archives

For several reasons, the beginnings of the NSW Country Party are different from those of its counterparts in other states. Its supporters included large graziers as well as small selectors; it initially made use of an existing party with metropolitan supporters; and it established an extensive party organisation in parallel to that of its supporting primary producer groups.

As in Victoria, the NSW party's origins can be traced to a rural pressure group, the Farmers and Settlers' Association of New South Wales (FSA) that was founded at Cootamundra in June 1883. By 1912 it boasted 373 branches. But at its 1912 Annual Conference a motion was lost for the foundation of a straightforward parliamentary Country Party. Instead the FSA continued to support various country factions in the state's Legislative Assembly.

In October 1919 a Central Electoral Council was formed by the FSA, the Graziers' Association of New South Wales and the People's Party of Soldiers and Citizens, with the aim of campaigning on behalf of the already existing Progressive Party in the 1920 state election – the first to be held under the proportional representation system introduced in 1918. The People's Party delegates withdrew from the Council over policy differences, and the Graziers' representatives were by no means convinced of the need for a permanent third party, since the interests of its wealthier members were closer to those of the National Party.

The heterogeneous character of Progressive Party support manifested itself publicly towards the end of 1921 when its parliamentary members with metropolitan seats grew restless over the party's links to primary producer organisations and proposed that they enter into coalition with the Nationalists. The rump of the Progressives – seven members led by Colonel M.F. Bruxner, and known as the "True Blues" – declared their separate identity and secured the backing of the FSA, and more reluctant support from the Graziers' Association. In 1925 the 'True Blues' were renamed the "Country Party".

In 1931 the party took the name 'United Country Party', after embracing the United Country Movement, which represented the four separatist, new state organisations then operating in NSW. Following a decision at the Australian Country Party Association's annual conference in December 1943, it became known as the Australian Country Party – New South Wales. In 1977, two years after a Federal Convention agreed to a name change, the NSW party became the National Country Party of Australia – New South Wales. In 1982 the NSW party voted to



change its name to the National Party of Australia – New South Wales.

The first consignment of archives, totalling 1.08 linear metres, from the party's NSW Head Office (PG2615), sheds little light on the party's establishment phase. In the Miscellaneous Party Promotional Material and Ephemera series the earliest item is a 1925 publication *Who's Who in the Progressive Party*. Otherwise the rest of the items in this series date from 1966-1991. Similarly, Annual Conference agendas (some annotated to show whether motions were withdrawn, reworded, amended, carried, lapsed or lost) are held for the period 1963-2000; and Electoral Campaign files are held for the period 1962-2003. There are also annotated Victorian Annual Conference business papers, 1949-63 and Victorian Women's Section Annual Conference business papers, 1956-64.

The largest accession of NSW party archives currently available publicly in an archive or manuscript library is at the National Library of Australia (MS7507, totalling 20.72 linear metres). The date range is 1915-83, but apart from two Progressive Party minute books dated 1915 and 1922-23, and what is identified as a 'slim minute book' dated 1922, the bulk of the records are subject and correspondence files produced during the period 1950-83.

Other collections of Country Party records, including original documents, copies and notes on them, can be found in the papers of two of the NSW party's historians, Don Aitkin (National Library of Australia, MS7990, 0.72 metres) and Ulrich Ellis (National Library of Australia, MS748, 2.24 metres and MS1006, 5.04 metres).

The Page Research Centre Library has been fortunate to obtain party room minutes from the Parliamentary National Party of New South Wales (PG2616, 1.44 metres). Confirmed and signed original minutes are extant for the periods 1932-55 and 1962-91. The accession also includes rough minute books for the periods 1969-90 and 1997-99; the party whip's correspondence and subject files for the period 1988-94; financial records; and photographs c. 1930-1984.

Federal Secretariat archives

The Federal party maintained no office or staff of its own until John McEwen House was opened in the parliamentary triangle at 7 National Circuit, Barton on 4 November 1968. The appointment of a Federal organising secretary had been considered in 1943, when amendments to the Australian Country Party Association's constitution were under discussion, but action was deferred because of the costs involved. Instead, the NSW General Secretary had continued to act as the Federal body's honorary secretary.

The Federal Secretariat "has been a contentious entity" since its establishment because of fiscal difficulties. The original, comparatively modest, John McEwen House was replaced in 1995-96 with a prestige three storey building, funded by a \$3 million mortgage. But leasing office space to generate much needed revenue was not as easy as had been anticipated. In consequence the Federal Secretariat was scaled back to one administrative officer, and the NSW General Secretary was again appointed honorary Federal Director from August 1998 until December 2000.

Although some Federal records are with the accession of NSW archives held by the National



Library, we have already located the original minute book of the Australian Country Party Association (1926-43) in the large accession of Federal Secretariat archives (PG2717) recently received by the Page Research Centre Library. Other series identified so far include Federal Council, Federal Conference, Women's Federal Council, and voluminous Campaign files. About 40 per cent of the accession has been sorted, and we look forward to further interesting "discoveries" before we complete arrangement and description and make the archives ready for access by researchers.

Conclusion

We are now well on the way to building Australia's largest collection of NPA archives. Tasks ahead of the Page Research Centre Library include devising strategies for making our holdings better known to researchers and party members alike, and facilitating arrangements for streamlining user access.

Preserving the party's past is just a first step. Making use of that past is our next challenge.

Don Boadle is archival consultant for the Page Research Centre Library Project. A graduate of the universities of Sydney and Cambridge, he was Director of the Charles Sturt University Regional Archives from 1994 until 2006.



Speech by the Federal Leader of The Nationals, Warren Truss, The Nationals Federal Council, Canberra, 22 August 2009

This Federal Council is where The Nationals take the next step to positively and ambitiously plan the future for our party, and to help create a better future for the people of regional Australia that we alone are specifically dedicated to represent.

As we do so, I am reminded of the old quote about the future and there being three kinds of people: “Those who let it happen, those who make it happen, and those who wonder what happened”.

I know what camp The Nationals have to be in. I certainly don’t want the future to be Kevin Rudd’s – it’s bad enough being in his present.

And I don’t want us to waste the opportunity that the next election represents: to get this great country back on track, where we pay our way, we strongly encourage investment and prosperity, and we are beholden to no one.

We have to make our own future. More than 7 million Australians who live outside the major cities need a party of committed men and women to stand up for them, deliver for them and not take a backwards step. We must reach out not just to our traditional voters but those we have lost in the past and those who have never thought about voting for us before.

But before we look to The Nationals’ future, it is important to spend a little time examining where Australia has ended up in the 21 months since the election of the Rudd Labor Government.

Before the 2007 election, Kevin Rudd told the nation that he could reduce petrol and grocery prices, cut bank fees, take over the public health system if the States did not lift their game, put a computer on the desk of every schoolchild, improve the lot of the homeless and indigenous people and provide fast broadband to 98% of the population for less than \$5 billion.

But petrol and grocery prices have gone up, so have bank fees. The date for the States to fix their hospital systems passed two months ago and we’re now having another six months of consultation. The computer on every desk has become a computer on every second desk and only then if the P&C pays for the electricity and maintenance. Not a single new home has built for the homeless or Aboriginal Australians. The broadband promise now covers only 90% of the population and the cost has gone up to \$46 billion – if it is ever built at all.

Kevin Rudd also told Australians that he was an “economic conservative” and that “reckless spending” would stop. Kevin Rudd said he would govern for all Australians.

On all of those promises and claims, Mr Rudd’s report card has been stamped with a great big F for fail.

As economics commentator Ross Gittins – no friend of the Coalition – said the other day: “In



the short time he's been in office, Rudd has established a record of over-promising and under-delivering. He invariably claims the fix he cobbled together is the biggest and best in ages. But then he moves on and something else becomes top priority."

But it would be unfair of me not to mention the Prime Minister's real achievements. In the area of spending other people's money, Kevin Rudd has scored an A. In fact, he deserves a gold star too.

The "economic conservative" who would stop the previous Government's "reckless spending", but no-one has ever spent more in such a short time - Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan make Gough Whitlam look like Scrooge McDuck.

It is astonishing to think that within a few short years, Federal debt is forecast to reach \$315 billion. I was there in the ministry for most of the Coalition's time in government, and saw first-hand how hard it was to pay back the \$96 billion of debt left behind by the Hawke and Keating governments.

\$315 billion is a whole new ball game. The children getting a new Julia Gillard Memorial Assembly Hall at their school should be told that they will be paying it off through higher taxes and poorer services for the rest of their lives. With the 40th anniversary of the moon landing just passed, it is worth noting that if you were to convert \$315 billion to ten dollar bills and lay them end to end they would stretch from the Earth to the moon, and back six and half times.

The Rudd Government has already built a legacy of debt and joblessness that we will remember for generations.

So, who is the team of champions that has created that legacy? Radio commentator Alan Jones recently noted that the six leading members of the Government from Mr Rudd down have a collective work experience of 181 years. But only 13 of those years were spent in the private sector, and 11 years of that 13 are credited to Julia Gillard who was working with a private law firm as a trade union lawyer!

So we have a collective TWO YEARS of genuine private sector business experience - although none were running a business - among the people calling the economic shots in Canberra. Yet these are the people now trusted with running the nation's biggest business - the national government.

Back in the mid to late 90s, we in the Liberal-Nationals Coalition had to make a number of very hard decisions about what programs should be cut or trimmed to get the books in order after the damage wrought by the Keating Government. We worked hard to avoid tax increases, reckoning that a low tax environment would help set up Australia for prosperity and job and investment creation once the economy was back on track. We were right.

We certainly would not and did not target regional Australia - where so much of our national wealth is created - with big and unconscionable spending cuts.

Compare that approach with the first Rudd Budget, which stripped more than \$1 billion from



country Australia. Regional development programs worth \$436 million were scrapped and replaced with one worth only \$176 million, and all that money was already allocated to Labor's election promises. Existing agricultural programs worth \$334 million were replaced with ones worth only \$220 million and most of those were about climate change, and of course the \$959 million Opel broadband contract to provide broadband to regional Australians was bumped off – with no credible alternative available.

The second Budget was even worse. Breaking an election promise, no specific program was put in place to support development in regional Australia and the Area Consultative Committees across the nation were axed. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry was the ONLY department hit with an extra efficiency dividend, seeing 312 staff dismissed, quarantine inspections of imports have been cut but export inspection charges are set to rise dramatically, making Australian exports less competitive. Land and Water Australia has been abolished and another \$12 million taken from the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. More than \$900 million in budgeted drought funding has simply disappeared, yet the drought continues to wreak havoc.

When it comes to regional Australia, Labor is dismissive, destructive and sneering. Labor has chosen a Minister for Regional Development, Anthony Albanese, who lives in inner Sydney. This Sydney Labor power monger is the one Labor sent out this morning to criticise The Nationals and our championing of the regions. He actually boasts about moving road funding away from the regions to the cities. The Agriculture Minister Tony Burke represents a neighbouring Sydney electorate that has the least number of people dependent on agriculture, fisheries and forestry of any electorate in Australia. The new Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development lives in Bannellong – not far away in central Sydney.

They don't understand and they don't care.

Sadly, the Australian system of politics has so often boiled down to one step forward, one step back. One side – always Labor – wrecks the economy, puts people out of work, sends investment and tax dollars offshore and panders to special interests.

Then the other side – always the Coalition – is voted back in to clean up the mess. To pay off the debt, provide a sensible and clear framework to create jobs and investment and – thanks largely to The Nationals – restore security, opportunity and prosperity for regional Australians.

It is no wonder so many of our fellow Australians are so cynical about politics.

The cynicism has already begun to emerge when people hear about Labor's hazy ambitions for paying back that debt. We still don't know for sure what the Rudd Government is proposing, but I think we'll know more once the Ken Henry's tax review is released later this year. So far, only an increase in the GST and new superannuation taxes has been ruled out; everything else is up for consideration. Over the past couple of weeks Labor has refused to rule out higher income taxes, new Medicare levies, capital gains tax on the family home, state income taxes and even death duties. So much money has been wildly spent that major new or increased taxes are certain under Labor.

Early this week one of the papers commissioned by the Henry review made it to the front page of the newspapers. Some Melbourne academics – hand-picked by Dr Henry – came up with



the idea of whacking an extra 10 cents a litre on fuel excise for every motorist. I have asked the Rudd Government four times to rule out such a new tax slug, but they will not do so. And they proposed to put a new monitoring device in your car so that big brother Canberra can know where you are driving and when and charge you extra if you are somewhere they don't want you to be.

Labor is preparing the ground for a new round of tax increases. We know Labor lives and dreams new and increased taxes. The Keating Government promised at election time that it would not increase fuel taxes but at its very next budget massively increased fuel excise and indexed the tax.

Last November, senior minister Stephen Conroy said the introduction of congestion charging was 'a welcome step'. A few months earlier, Dr Henry himself alluded publicly to increased diesel fuel excise for heavy vehicle operators being a 'pre-condition for other, more important, land transport reforms'. Does he not know that the road transport industry is already fully cost recovered for its use of the road system?

Higher fuel taxes are a tax on living and doing business in regional Australia. What these city-based pointy heads have forgotten is people living in regional Australia have to drive further each day to go to work, take their children to school or go to the doctor, compared to their city cousins. Often they drive on dirt roads and in most cases there is no public transport network to fall back on either.

Higher fuel taxes are a zonal tax on the regions.

Of course, we've begun to see the colour of one of Labor's new taxes, and it's green. And it will send us further into the red.

The proposed Rudd emissions trading scheme, or carbon pollution reduction scheme as the Labor spin doctors have styled it, is a radical new tax.

His go it alone CPRS is the harshest proposed anywhere in the world and it would touch everything we do. Everything we eat and drink would cost more. Cost of doing business in the country will skyrocket and jobs would be exported overseas. But the CPRS will do nothing for the environment, global emissions would continue to rise, the Murray will stay empty, it will not save the Great Barrier Reef and not a single polar bear would be spared.

One study has shown that in its first year, the Rudd CPRS would cost each Australian \$404. The scheme proposed in the United States, will cost only \$57 per person and the one operating in Europe only 80 cents per person.

This week's closure of a Cement Australia's Rockhampton plant is an illustration of what to expect when Australia has a CPRS and others do not. While Cement Australia gave a couple of reasons for its decision to close the plant, they devoted a whole paragraph of their press release to their concerns about the CPRS. Cement manufacture is a major emitter and Cement Australia said there could be no long-term future for the plant under Labor's CPRS. Other cement plants in Australia are also likely to close with more jobs lost, almost all in regional Australia.



But there will be no environmental benefits. When cement is manufactured in Australia, there are approximately 0.8 tonnes of CO₂ emitted for every tonne of cement produced. When our mills close, we will import cement from China, where the emissions are 1.1 tonnes for every tonne of cement produced. So under Labor's CPRS Australia will lose jobs but global emissions will actually go up.

The Labor Government demanded that their CPRS be passed by the Parliament without any amendments. They were not even prepared to correct obvious drafting errors. For instance, as the legislation stands, Australia coal miners will have to pay not just for the emissions from their mining operations but also on the use of the coal wherever it is exported around the world (unless they sell it through an agent). There will be no new Australian coalmines under Labor's CPRS even though China is planning to build another 100 coal fired power stations over the next ten years.

The Nationals are not anti environment and we have agreed to support bi-partisan targets for Australia to take to the climate change discussions in Copenhagen later this year. Australia must be part of a global response to address climate change but with our 1.3 per cent share of global emissions – and that share is going down – we cannot fix the problems ourselves. Even if we were to pass Labor's draconian CPRS before Copenhagen no one will be listening and no one will follow. Kevin Rudd loves to strut the world stage but he is being delusionary if he thinks the United States, Europe or others will abandon their own emission reduction schemes in favour of Australia's.

The Rudd ETS would have a disproportionately harsh affect upon regional jobs, investment and lifestyle. For that reason alone The Nationals will never support the Rudd model of a carbon pollution reduction scheme. We voted against it last week – so did the Liberal Party – and The Nationals will do so again, no matter how many times Labor puts its scheme before Parliament.

Within months, we could be going into another election campaign. Whether it is the normal one we see every three years, an early election or a contrived double dissolution The Nationals will be ready to provide a positive policy alternative.

After the last election loss, the party commissioned a review by former leader John Anderson and former NSW state director Michael Priebe. The public had sent us a message and we wanted to make sure we learnt from it, and we looked carefully at what changes in approach and policy might be needed to retain our traditional support but also work towards gaining the support of the up to 50 percent of Australians who consider themselves swinging voters.

Today we will be debating a 54-page policy document for The Nationals. This is a work in progress and is the first major review of our policy platform since 2004. It does not cover every element of our policy interests. It does focus comprehensively on 12 key areas of importance to the people of regional Australia. These are: health, education, food security and agriculture, land and water management, the economy and taxation, regional development, small business and tourism, transport, communications, social justice, climate change and trade.

Of course, the economic management of this country is of paramount importance. There are many things we will want and need to do that will not be possible under the weight of Labor's



debt. There are matters such as national security, workplace relations and support for the less well off where The Nationals will also want to make major contributions. We know it is important that as we gear up for the next election, regional people can see our bona fides and how we intend delivering security, opportunity and prosperity to them.

I don't propose to explore all 54 pages in detail in this speech. But some of policies we will ask you to consider today include:

- A targeted fund for regional health infrastructure and incentives to attract medical professionals to a practice in a regional community;
- A Minister for Regional Health, dedicated to devoting his or her full attention to regional health concerns and integrating the many and sometimes confusing array of programs into a comprehensive health service;
- Local hospital boards to run local hospitals and to set local priorities and with direct federal funding;
- Reforming Labor's disastrous changes to Youth Allowance, and empowering local school communities to develop infrastructure projects rather than being told what to do from on high;
- Rebalancing land use by farming, mining and forestry to ensure all three prosper and the nation's food security is protected, and create a Ministry of Food Security;
- Unfreeze the \$5.8 billion set aside by the Coalition to invest in water efficiency on our farms and regional water supplies; to deliver more water for the environment and for productive use; and there will be socio-economic studies before any more water is bought in the Murray Darling Basin.
- Guarantee a fair share of Government funding for regional infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, and broaden the Better Regions program so that seats held by other than the Labor Party also get a look-in;
- And we will build the Inland Rail from Melbourne to Brisbane.

The Nationals are committed to building a strong future for regional Australia. There is a big task ahead of The Nationals at the next election. But I believe we have the policies, commitment, drive and personnel to break through. Help us to help you to make Australia great again.



The Best In The West

Mia Davies, Western Australian MLC

The longest week in Western Australian politics began on September 6 2008 with the State election. By the end of the night two-thirds of the votes were counted but neither Labor nor the Liberal Party could form government in their own right. Two and a half years after The Nationals WA stated their intent to contest the next State election as an independent political party seeking to hold the balance of power in the Parliament it seemed the moment had arrived.

Western Australian Nationals' leader Brendon Grylls told the media that the Party would honour its commitment to negotiate in good faith with both major parties. He spoke with the Leader of the Liberal Party (Colin Barnett) and Labor Party (Alan Carpenter) and asked them to prepare a proposal that would enable a new government to deliver The Nationals key election commitment, Royalties for Regions. The program was the centrepiece of the Party's election strategy and promised to deliver millions of dollars back to regional Western Australia.

The week between the election and the decision to form a power sharing alliance with the Liberal Party was an exceptionally difficult week for WA Nationals MPs, State Councillors and members. At the end of a long week of negotiations by the leadership team of Brendon Grylls and Wendy Duncan, State President, the proposals were presented for consideration by all MPs and potential MPs (those candidates that looked likely to be elected) and State Council, who were sequestered for discussion and debate. They were joined by Karlene Maywald and Robyn Cain from South Australia who provided advice on Karlene's experience as an independent Nationals' Minister in the Rann Labor Government.

At all times we were focussed on delivering on our promise to use our position to extract the best deal for regional Western Australians. The final decision was based on a number of factors, but the most critical was that a deal with the Liberal Party delivered us the balance of power in both Houses of Parliament and gave us greater opportunity to deliver on our agenda in Government.

The Nationals had gone into the election with 11 major policies. The overarching policy platform was Royalties for Regions, which is now an historic agreement that returns the equivalent of 25 per cent of the State's mining and onshore petroleum royalties to WA's regional areas each year for investment in projects, infrastructure and community services.

The Nationals other policies were:

opposing the closure of the Telstra CDMA network until such time country customers had confidence in the NextG service

funding the Royal Flying Doctors Service to purchase new aircraft and staff them appropriately



upholding the numerous referendums on daylight saving to oppose legislation for its introduction

protecting small business by retaining regulated trading hours

funding for a long overdue upgrade of the Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital

providing new and affordable housing for essential workers in the regions (police, teachers and nurses)

BushChange, a grant to encourage people to move to towns with a population under 10,000

the introduction of a Mining Exploration Incentive Scheme

County Aged Pensioner Fuel Card, a \$500 fuel card for all country aged pensioners in lieu of access to public transport

the expansion of the Ord River Irrigation Area (Ord Stage II)

Ultimately The Nationals joined with the Liberals to form a power sharing agreement known as the Liberal-Nationals Alliance. It is not a coalition – the parties do not hold joint party room meetings – and Brendon Grylls rejected taking on the role of Deputy Premier. The formal agreement was based on the arrangement in place between Karlene Maywald and the Rann government and allows The Nationals to maintain its independence in the Parliament and in the Cabinet.

The Royalties for Regions Bill 2009 will be considered by the Legislative Council before the end of 2009. When it is passed, the election commitment that is now a Liberal-Nationals Government policy will be enshrined in legislation. The structure of the Western Australian Legislative Council will require country Members of Parliament in future Governments to vote against the principle of returning royalties to the regions if they wish to dismantle the legislation. Significant funding has already been rolled out under the Royalties for Regions banner this year. When legislated, there will be a Royalties for Regions Trust that will be capped at \$1 billion. The fund is made up of contestable and non-contestable funding and will be overseen by an independent board.

Our campaign team acknowledges that there is no “one size fits all” strategy for The Nationals across Australia. The key to our success was our independence – it gave us the freedom to make policy decisions that were in the best interest of our constituency unfettered by the Coalition party room process. It enabled us to pursue an agenda that reflected what regional Western Australians needed. We tapped into the “fair go” sentiment and Royalties for Regions became the catch cry to redress the balance between expenditure in the city and regions. Achieving the balance of power was the mechanism to deliver our election promises and deal regional Western Australians in on every decision made by Government. Success was



contingent on the fact that we were prepared to deal with either side of the political spectrum – we weren't focused on the politics, just delivering the best for our constituents.

From a campaigning point of view, the key to success was a long-term effort. We did not have the funds to compete in the last four weeks of the election against the two major parties. Our view was that the final four weeks were the icing on the cake. As a minor party we need to think outside the square when it comes to campaigning – the traditional methods do not deliver good outcomes for us (or if they do, it's at great expense).

In the Legislative Assembly The Nationals contested: two safe National seats [Central Wheatbelt, Wagin], two marginal National seats (v Liberals) [Moore, Blackwood-Stirling], two safe Labor seats [Kimberley, Pilbara], one marginal Labor seat [North West], two safe Liberal seats [Eyre, Murray-Wellington], three marginal Liberal seats [Albany, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton]. We won four Legislative Assembly seats:

Hon Brendon Grylls, Leader, Minister for Regional Development, Lands, Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development and Member for Central Wheatbelt
the Deputy Leader of The Nationals is Hon Terry (Tuck) Waldron, Minister for Racing & Gaming, Sport & Recreation, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health and the Member for Wagin;

Hon Terry Redman is the Minister for Agriculture & Food, Forestry, Minister Assisting the Minister for Education and the Member for Blackwood-Stirling; and

Hon Grant Woodhams is the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and Member for Moore. Labor candidate Vincent Catania won the seat of North West (narrowly beating strong Nationals' candidate Tom Day) and has subsequently relinquished his Labor membership to become a member of The Nationals WA (September 2009).

The Nationals won five Legislative Council seats:

Hon Wendy Duncan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Regional Development, Lands, Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development and Member for the Mining & Pastoral Region;

Hon Max Trenorden, Member for the Agricultural Region;

Hon Philip Gardiner, Member for the Agricultural Region;

Hon Mia Davies, Member for the Agricultural Region; and

Hon Colin Holt, who is State President and Member for the South West Region.

The vote transfer from the Legislative Assembly to the Legislative Council was exceptionally high – particularly in the Mining & Pastoral Region where more people voted for The Nationals than they did for their Legislative Assembly candidate. The strength of the Royalties for Regions policy and strong link to The Nationals in the North West of the State was undoubtedly the reason for this result.

The final result is more exceptional than it seems on face value. The 2008 State election was called on 7 August by Premier Alan Carpenter. Political pundits were predicting that Brendon Grylls would be leading a Party of one due to the fact it was the first election contested under the one vote-one value electoral boundaries that gave the Labor Party a notional 17-seat majority, shifted six country seats into the city and merged four National electorates [Avon, Merredin, Stirling and Wagin] into two [Central Wheatbelt and Wagin]. The redistribution was based on a statewide quota of 21,350 electors per electorate with a 10 per cent margin of



allowance with the exception that any district with an area exceeding 100,000 square kilometres was given a large district allowance. This applied to only five of the 59 new seats. One example is the new seat of Kalgoorlie with 13,656 electors and an area that has been increased a thousandfold in comparison to its previous size.

State elections normally take place every four years and are typically held in February. In August 2008 Alan Carpenter (who was elevated to Premier on the resignation of Geoff Gallop mid-term) called a snap election the day after the Liberal Party announced its fourth leadership change in three years. The new leader, Colin Barnett, had announced his retirement as the Member for Cottesloe and a candidate had been pre-selected for his seat.

There were a number of other factors that impacted on the final result

the 2008 Beijing Olympics overshadowed the first two weeks of the campaign

A nine per cent swing against the Labor Government in the recent Northern Territory elections had been largely blamed on Labor calling an early election

the Greens held the balance of power in the WA Legislative Council, along with Independent Shelley Archer (formerly Labor)

three Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) reports were due to be handed down in October 2008, all of which were anticipated to contain adverse findings for a number of Labor Party Members of Parliament and supporters.

The Nationals had been preparing for the election since the decision made by State Council in March 2006 to contest the following State election as an independent political party. We met with advertising agency CampaignMakers in November 2006 and awarded them a contract for the provision of creative strategy designed to educate voters on the balance of power and the Party's independent stance.

The generic "Your call Shorts" television commercial that was the centre of the campaign provided the basis for the Party's push to educate the electorate as to the value of The Nationals holding the balance of power in the State Parliament. It was aired with low frequency over an almost two-year period (January 2007 - October 2008) to prompt the electorate to ask "who is Shorts?" and "what does he have to do with The Nationals".

A secondary campaign message utilised during the election campaign period was the line "Who's looking after regional WA? Labor aren't ... the Libs can't. The Nationals can." A number of variations were used by candidates to localise the theme (for example, "Who's looking after Central Wheatbelt? Labor aren't ... the Libs can't. Brendon Grylls can.").

The CampaignMakers concept provided the basis for The Nationals election campaign strategy and informed the in-house development of candidate specific material. The "Your call Shorts" and "Who's looking after ..." messages were incorporated into a Nationals' branded campaign suite.

Vital to the election result was the use of television and radio commercials and the application of message and imagery to candidate campaign materials, paid for by the party. A website contained a page for all candidates and was the distribution point for the television commercials, media statements and all printed material relevant to the campaign. Core flute



posters were printed for every polling booth in regional electorates, one with the Royalties for Regions message and logo, the other with a photo of Brendon Grylls. Both were strongly branded with The Nationals WA logo and an “independent” stamp. Candidates funded specific television and radio commercials using the generic formats, distribution of flyers, press advertisements and in-campaign media support.

The path we chose was not without its challenges. Our independent stance immediately placed The Nationals in a “media wilderness”. Without Shadow Ministers or as part of the official Opposition, the challenge facing Brendon and the team was how to sell our vision to the public. An informal decision was made to put aside the traditional role of being in Opposition – reacting to Government policy and being tied to their agenda was not going to promote our vision for regional Western Australia. Our Members still diligently raised issues in Parliament on behalf of their constituents, but in the public sphere away from the Parliament the Party set its own agenda and focussed on educating the public on Royalties for Regions and their opportunity to help The Nationals deliver it.

Parallel to this, the Leader’s Office had purchased a newsroom grade camera that travelled with the Leader and Parliamentary Members to capture vision and sound packages on key issues and policy that were edited together in-house and then used in a variety of different forums. Vision and sound packages were offered to television stations to be developed into news stories to raise the profile of the Leader and promote the Parliamentary Party’s position on key issues and current affairs. With only two regional television stations with limited resources to cover the vast State it meant our offer of raw footage and media grabs were regularly taken up, and in many cases the stations added the vision to their library stock for use on other occasions.

In addition, as the Leader travelled the State, we packaged up “soft” news items and uploaded them to the website via You Tube. This allowed us to forward the link to relevant email databases and news outlets.

The campaign team managed the production of all print media in-house and created generic generic radio and television scripts for all candidates. A majority of candidates utilised these while a few ran their own scripts in consultation with the central campaign.

We took a pragmatic view of policy development during the 2008 election cycle developing discussion papers on key issues that could be encapsulated in one page, including recommendations and costs for the implementation. Each discussion paper was supported by a formal launch at a regional location or appropriate event; a 30-second television package that was uploaded to the Leader’s website and aired for one week on regional television, and a media statement that leveraged free coverage.

In addition, key policies were supported by quirky DL fliers that were distributed into key regional seats, with Royalties for Regions “ever feel like you’re getting a raw deal”, housing for essential workers “renovators delight” and retail trading hours and daylight savings referendums “pointless”.

There were a series of pre-campaign and in-campaign electorate tours by the leadership team,



led by Brendon Grylls and Wendy Duncan, visiting the Kimberley, Pilbara, North West, Goldfields on a number of occasions in the two years prior to the election. We also held a pre-campaign meeting with all Parliamentary Members in Denmark to discuss policy development, central campaign themes and the services the campaign team could provide to assist the Parliamentary Members and candidates. Parliamentary Members attended every major regional field day and expo and made themselves available to attend The Nationals tent / marquee kitted out with banners, posters and a showbag (reusable shopping bag with Nationals logo and “Your call Shorts” branding). Free T-shirts – that were given away on the proviso they had to be worn by members of the public that day – carried the “Tired of feeling tired” daylight savings message or “end the royalty rip-off” Royalties for Regions message.

The official campaign launch was held in Perth on 22 August 2008 and showcased all Nationals’ candidates. At that stage it was one of the most successful functions hosted by The Nationals in recent history with attendance of over 200 members, corporate supporters and interested parties. The Leader’s speech was supported by an audiovisual presentation titled “The journey” that encapsulated the issues, strategy and focal points of the campaign as the Party prepared for the State election over the preceding two-year period. We have recently topped this with a spectacular Gala Ball to celebrate our first year holding the balance of power – 500 supporters, members and corporates joined us for the celebration.

The Upper House teams ran strong campaigns to build the brand and constructed their campaigns around the themes of “Who’s looking after regional WA? Labor aren’t ... Libs can;t ...” and Royalties for Regions. Each team were provided with artwork that incorporated the whole team (posters, car magnets, flyers) with the message “Your vote could put this team into the Upper House ... Their vote could tip the balance in your favour”. A majority of central campaign material included information about both the Lower House and Upper House candidates to maximise exposure build the “team” image. This printed material complemented the 30-second television commercials showcasing all Upper House candidates with a message from the Leader reminding people of the importance of voting in the Upper House.

The Agricultural and Mining & Pastoral teams were the best resourced with an incumbent Member of Parliament leading each of these tickets. Despite this, our South West Region candidate (Colin Holt), who had put his name on the ticket for the team, worked diligently throughout the electorate and was without doubt the surprise result of the election!

The result of this concerted effort to build the brand was a vast improvement in vote transfer from the Assembly to the Council and can be attributed to a number of factors:

- the decision to remain as an independent political party, before and after the State election;

- a strong central campaign message focussed on linking The Nationals brand, the Leader, and Royalties for Regions delivered over a long period of time;



galvanising support in the regions by offering The Nationals holding the balance of power on behalf of regional WA as a solution to the disenfranchisement that regional people felt due to one vote one value; and

quality candidates who sought out endorsement to assist the Party sell the message of independence, Royalties for Regions and balance of power (in contrast to the independent campaigns candidates have run in past elections).

There was merit in a conscious decision to focus on educating the electorate on the mechanism to deliver policy rather than creating detailed policy documents. There was also value in the decision taken to focus on promoting our key policy rather than taking the traditional Opposition role of attacking and dissecting the Government. Keeping the message positive was a key strategy, we believed that people were over combative politics (especially after the Federal election) and candidates were advised to focus on the positive, ignore their opponents (Liberal, Labor, Greens, independents) and deliver the message that voters could bring about change. It is worth noting that the Liberal Party ran an almost exclusively negative campaign. At a local level, particularly in electorates being contested by a National – the major Parties candidate’s focussed on discrediting Royalties for Regions and Nationals’ candidates. Embracing the media and telling people what we were doing instead of fighting the good fight and not letting anyone know about it was another conscious decision by the campaign team. We picked quirky, high-profile issues and made them our own. Every aspect of the campaign was run to maximise media exposure. The use of big picture ideas, overlaid with themes of state building and nation building and creating a sense of statesmanship around the leadership team (Royalties for Regions to benefit the whole state) was critical to the outcome. This was complimented by local “feel good” policy initiatives such as the Aged Pensioner Fuel Card.

When it came to the budget, we cut the cloth to fit the dollars we had in the bank. Our advertising campaign (regional footprint only) commenced two years prior to the State election, which meant we were getting maximum exposure outside the saturated four-week campaign period. The campaign committee kept a tight rein on expenses and we were not spending any money until we had it in the bank. It was the first year that we’d had a poll tax for the State election.

In summary, we learned a great deal. In hindsight, some of these lessons seem obvious:

Candidates who had no previous exposure to campaigning benefited most from accompanying the Leader or other Members of Parliament on tours and to regional events.

Talking Points were valuable tools for communicating to a range of stakeholders (candidates, State Council, State Executive, PNP, Electorate Officers, staff, membership).

State Executive decided against sending out postal votes based on analysis of previous election results. The number of postal votes lodged in 2008 remained at a similar percentage as previous years, vindicating this decision and saving a significant amount in



The biggest challenges will be to maintain our identity and independence in Government and capitalise on our Ministerial positions. From an organisational point of view, we are working hard to develop strategies to maintain the close connection we developed with our candidates and membership during the campaign period. We must be able to arm our members and supporters with information that allows them to promote Royalties for Regions as something to be valued, owned and protected by all regional Western Australians.

It would appear, at least anecdotally, that The Nationals are still strongly linked to Royalties for Regions in Government. There has been an interesting dynamic created as a result of the Party holding the balance of power that makes it very hard for either of the major Parties to criticise the policy, given that they were both willing to support the policy in order to form Government. The success of the policy will be its ability to withstand criticism of being a “slush fund” for The Nationals. Under the stewardship of Brendon Grylls as the Minister for Regional Development, a large proportion of the funding has been delivered directly into the hands of local government authorities and the nine Regional Development Commissions. From there it is to be allocated under systems that require local decision makers to prioritise its expenditure. The remaining portion will be allocated to strategic projects and systems for ensuring that these are prioritised by regional stakeholders rather than the Minister.

It has been a year of great change for The Nationals in Western Australia. Most importantly, it has been a year of great change for people who choose to live, work and invest in our regions. Just four percent of the State’s budget has captured the imagination of the electorate and delivered change far beyond bricks and mortar and essential services. The mood is palpable and even in these difficult economic times there is a sense of renewal in the regions.



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