THE NATIONALS

Driving Australia's development since 1920

By Paul Davey

ORIGINS

Country parties began to be established in the States from 1913 and by 1920 were operating in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. Their primary objective was to fight for greater recognition by State governments of the needs of primary producers and people living and working beyond the capital cities – the country 'townsman'. That objective remains central to the policy priorities of today's National Parties at State and Commonwealth levels.

The Nationals are the only political organisation in Australia that exclusively works for the interests of country and regional Australia. While other major parties can claim significant non-metropolitan representation in Parliament, they are dominated by city interests. This is not the case with The Nationals, whose members overwhelmingly live beyond the capitals.

FEDERAL PARTY

At the Commonwealth level, the National Party of Australia had its origins in the lead up to the December 1919 election, when a number of candidates for the House of Representatives agreed to support the political objectives of the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation (AFFO), which were:

> To watch over and guard the interests of primary producers; to prevent duplication of taxation and the overlapping of State and Federal administration; to obviate conflict between Commonwealth and State industrial laws and awards; to encourage scientific agricultural education and co-operative trading in the interests of primary producers.

On 22 January 1920, 11 of those Members held a meeting and unanimously resolved to establish an independent Federal political party:

> That the Party shall be known as the Australian Country Party and shall act independently of all other political organizations.

The new Party elected the Tasmanian Member for Franklin, William James McWilliams as its Parliamentary Leader, agreeing that after a settling in period of about 12 months new leadership

elections would be held. McWilliams relinquished the leadership to the NSW Member for Cowper, Earle Christmas Grafton Page, on 5 April 1921.

The Australian Country Party (ACP) campaigned in its own right for the 16 December 1922 election, winning 14 seats and holding the balance of power. The Party has been represented in the Commonwealth Parliament ever since.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENCE

Since its formation, the ACP and contemporary National Party of Australia (NPA) has been the subject of many attempts to merge or amalgamate with other non-Labor organisations – the Nationalists, United Australia Party (UAP) and Liberal Party of Australia (LP).

However, the primary objective of forming the CP, federally and in the States, was to be separate from the main political parties of the day. The CP craved independence and has cherished it ever since. Even though it works cooperatively in Coalition with the LP it is jealous of its independent entity.

PROVIDING THE BALANCE

A significant and little recognised role of the NPA has been to provide a balance between political extremes. As former Leader, Doug Anthony, told the Party's Federal Council on 7 October 1972:

> A strong Country Party does keep the balance – the balance of stable Government, dependable Government; the balance of development between the city and the country areas; the balance of economic activity; a balance between the rural industries and the other sectors of the community.

> We want to see a balance of opportunity for education and employment; a balance of special justice between different sections of the community; a proper balance between the powers and responsibilities of the State Governments and the Commonwealth Government, with neither becoming over-dominant, but working in partnership. We keep a balance between extremes of political thought.

> *By far the Party's greatest achievement, at State and Commonwealth levels, has been to force other political parties to pay far greater attention to the social and economic development of country and regional Australia.*

THE LANDMARK ACHIEVEMENTS

The Party has often been accused of wielding more influence in Coalition Governments than its parliamentary numbers warrant. It makes no apology for achieving outcomes for its constituency. Some of the landmark achievements of the National Party of Australia have included establishing:

- the nation's first radio broadcasting licences (1923)
- a restructured Commonwealth Bank as a central bank (1924)
- a Rural Credits Department within the Commonwealth Bank (1925) and the Commonwealth Savings Bank (1927)
- the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research – today's CSIRO (1926)
- the first Federal Aid Roads Agreement (1926)
- the Australian Broadcasting Commission (1932)
- the Australian Trade Commissioner Service, now Austrade (1934)
- the Australian Agricultural Council (1935)
- the National Health and Medical Research Council (1936)
- free milk for children under 13 in schools throughout Australia (1950)
- free medical treatment for pensioners (1951)
- the first Medical Benefits Scheme (1953)
- the introduction of television to Australia (1956)
- the Australia-Japan Trade Treaty (1957) and countless trade agreements over the years

  every Australian Trade Minister in Commonwealth Coalition Governments since January 1956 has been from the Country or National Party

- expanded non-metropolitan primary, secondary and tertiary education facilities – notably the University of New England, Armidale.
- the Beef Road Programme in the Northern Territory (1962-68).
- State Aid to Independent schools (1964).
- the New Zealand-Australia Free Trade Agreement (1965) and Closer Economic Relations with New Zealand (1983)
- the 200-mile Australian Fishing Zone (1979)
- the Australian Institute of Sport (1981).

IN MORE RECENT YEARS, THE NATIONALS CAN CLAIM CREDIT FOR

- Free trade agreements with Singapore, Thailand and the United States of America
- Roads of National Importance and Black Spots programmes
- Agriculture – Advancing Australia package
- Natural Heritage Trust
- Supermarket to Asia
- Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
- National Water Initiative
- *Auslink* national land transport programme
- Regional Australia Summit leading to, among other initiatives, the Regional Solutions programme
- the CDMA mobile phone network to replace Analogue
- Establishment of Telstra Country Wide and the allocation of hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade rural and regional telephone and internet services and provide customer service guarantees.

POWER AND INFLUENCE

Since its formation, the Party has from time to time exerted a domineering influence on non-Labor party relations:

1923   After the February election, the Country Party held the balance of power. ACP Leader Earle Page refused to go into Coalition with Billy Hughes as Leader of the Nationalists. The Nationalists elected Stanley Bruce. Page agreed to form a Coalition Government with Bruce – the first involvement of the ACP in Federal Coalition arrangements.

1939   When Joe Lyons dies in office, Earle Page becomes Prime Minister from 7 to 26 April, pending the election of a new United Australia Party (UAP) Leader and Prime Minister. The UAP elects Robert Menzies. Page refuses to work with him and withdraws the ACP from the Coalition, leaving Menzies with a minority Government.

1939   Robert Menzies resigns as Prime Minister and the Opposition UAP and Country Parties unanimously elect ACP Leader Arthur Fadden as Prime Minister on 29 August. Fadden's budget is voted down by two Independent Victorian parliamentarians and the Government is defeated on 7 October 1941. Labor's John Curtin wins the subsequent election and Fadden is elected Leader of the Coalition Opposition – a position he holds until after the 1943 election, when the ACP decides not to work in formal Coalition in Opposition.

1967   Prime Minister Harold Holt disappears in the surf off Cheviot Beach, Victoria. ACP Leader John McEwen is sworn in as Prime Minister until the Liberal Party elects a new Leader. However, he vows the Country Party will not stay in Coalition if the Liberals elect William McMahon. The Liberal Party elects John Gorton as Leader. McEwen's prime ministership runs from 19 December 1967 to 10 January 1968.

1975   The Parliamentary Party is rock solid behind the Opposition tactic to withhold Supply until the Whitlam Labor Government agrees to an election, providing vital support to Opposition Leader Malcolm Fraser, who is facing mounting concern on the issue from some Liberal Senators. Whitlam refuses to go to he polls, resulting in his sacking by the Governor-General on 11 November. Labor is crushed at the election on 13 December, with the Coalition winning 91 seats in the House of Representatives (23 of which are won by the National Country Party) to Labor's 36, as well as a majority in the Senate.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Earle Page
Leader 1920-1939
Federal Chairman 1926-1961

The Rt. Hon. Sir Arthur Fadden
Leader 1941-1958

Federal National Party Leader Rt Hon Doug Anthony (right) greets Liberal Leader
and Prime Minister, Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser at a Federal Conference in Canberra.

Rt Hon Ian Sinclair (then Minister for Defence) and Hon
Andrew Peacock (Lib, Minister for Army) during a visit
to South Vietnam, circa 1970.

Hon Tim Fischer, who lead the National Party to
victory in the Coalition landslide of 1996 against
the incumbent Keating Labor Government.

Rt Hon Doug Anthony with the first female
Federal President of the Party, Mrs Shirley
McKerrow AM.

The National Party's first
woman Senator, Lady Florence
Bjelke Petersen – or 'Flo'.

Then Governor General Sir John Kerr (left) swears into office
Doug Anthony and Ian Sinclair as part of a caretaker coalition
government in 1975.

Elected Federal Leader and Deputy Prime Minister in
2005, Mark Vaile also became the 4th National Party
leader to hold the Trade Portfolio.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade Hon Tim Fischer (left)
and his deputy, Hon John Anderson, Minister for Primary Industries
and Energy, from 1996-1999.

Senator Ron Boswell,
Queensland.

John McEwen

Doug and Margot Anthony.

John Anderson.

Doug Anthony and campaign workers in 1977.

FEDERAL LEADERS

McWILLIAMS, William James
24 Feb 1920 to 5 Apr 1921

PAGE, Earle Christmas Grafton
5 Apr 1921 to 13 Sept 1939
(Prime Minister 7-26 Apr 1939)

CAMERON, Archie Galbraith
13 Sept 1939 to 16 Oct 1940

FADDEN, Arthur William
16 Oct 1940 to 12 Mar 1941 (Acting)
12 Mar 1941 to 26 Mar 1958
(Prime Minister 29 Aug to 7 Oct 1941)
(Opposition Leader 7 Oct 1941 to 16 Sept 1943)

McEWEN, John
26 Mar 1958 to 1 Feb 1971
(Prime Minister 19 Dec 1967 to 10 Jan 1968)

ANTHONY, John Douglas
2 Feb 1971 to 17 Jan 1984

SINCLAIR, Ian McCahon
17 Jan 1984 to 9 May 1989

BLUNT, Charles William
9 May 1989 to 6 Apr 1990

FISCHER, Timothy Andrew
10 Apr 1990 to 1 July 1999

ANDERSON, John Duncan
1 July 1999 to 23 June 2005

VAILE, Mark Anthony James
23 June 2005 to current

FEDERAL PRESIDENTS

PAGE, Earle Christmas Grafton (NSW)
1926-1961

MOSS, William Lionel (Vic)
1962-1968

HUNT, Ralph James Dunnett (NSW)
1968-1969

ROBERTS, Sidney (Qld)
1969-1974

SOLOMONS, Louis Adrian (NSW)
1974-1978

DRAKE-BROCKMAN, Thomas Charles (WA)
1978-1981

McKERROW, Shirley (Vic)
1981-1987

McDONALD, Stuart (Vic)
1987-1990

PATERSON, John (WA)
1990-1996

McDONALD, Don (Qld)
1996-1999

DICKIE, Helen (NSW)
1999-2005

RUSSELL, David (Qld)
2005-2006

THE EVOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

22 January 1920	The Australian Country Party (ACP) is formed in the Commonwealth Parliament.
27 October 1973	The Country Party in Queensland votes to become the National Party of Australia – Queensland. The new name is officially launched on 6 April 1974.
9 March 1974	The ACP Federal Council agrees by 18 votes to six to recommend the federal party name be changed to National Country Party of Australia.
28 July 1974	The Western Australian party becomes the National Country Party of Australia – Western Australia.
2 May 1975	A Federal Convention agrees the federal party name should be the National Country Party of Australia.
24 July 1975	The Victorian party votes to change its name to the National Party of Australia – Victoria.
9 September 1975	The South Australian party votes to become the National Country Party of Australia – South Australlia.
26 June 1977	The NSW party votes to become the National Country Party of Australia – New South Wales.
16 June 1982	The NSW party votes to become the National Party of Australia – New South Wales.
16 October 1982	Federal Conference votes to change the federal name to National Party of Australia.
4 August 1984	The South Australian party becomes the National Party of Australia – South Australlia (Inc).
10 October 1984	The Western Australian party becomes the National Party of Australia – Western Australia.
11 October 2003	Federal Conference endorses use of 'The Nationals' as the party's uniform shortened name and logo for all future Commonwealth and State elections. While not a constitutional name change, The Nationals is universally adopted by all State parties for election campaigns.

Federal Nationals Leader and Deputy Prime Minister Doug Anthony boards a TAA flight at the Gold Coast, 1976.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on The Nationals is available from

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Visit our website for information on the Party, its policies, latest media release and details on our Senators and Members of the Commonwealth Parliament

www.nationals.org.au

This site will also link you to The Nationals website in your State.

ACHIEVEMENT

2004

National water initiative

THE NATIONALS