



Speech by

## Vaughan Johnson

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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### MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: DEATH OF SIR WALLACE ALEXANDER RAMSAY RAE

**Mr JOHNSON** (Gregory—NPA) (9.44 am): It gives me great pleasure this morning to rise to speak to the motion moved by the Premier relating to the late Sir Wallace Alexander Ramsay Rae. The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party have also spoken to this motion. I say from the outset that Wally Rae was one of those legendary people. He was a colourful character. He epitomises what western Queenslanders are all about. He was a champion of the people. He cared about people, regardless of their political persuasion or their standing in life. Wally Rae was their man. I am very proud to be able to stand here today and speak of the life and some of the happenings in the life of Sir Wallace Alexander Ramsay Rae.

Wally Rae was born in Sydney on 13 March 1913. There have been conflicting reports about the date of his birth but I have checked it with his nephew this morning. He was born at Lindfield. His father and mother were George and Alice Rae. He was one of five children. He is predeceased by a brother who also had extensive military service and is survived by his sisters—Alice, Dorothy and Bette—and five nieces and nephews.

As previous speakers have said today, Wally Rae's name became synonymous with western Queensland in the 1930s when he went to Warrnambool station at Winton. He was a jackeroo and later became the overseer. His life as a pastoral worker carried on from there. He became heavily involved in stock work and as a pastoral inspector for the pastoral company Winchombe Carson. In later years Wally became a stock dealer and worked more extensively with stock himself.

In 1957 he was elected to the Queensland Legislative Assembly as the member for Gregory on the death of the then member for Gregory, Mr George Devries. With the split in the ALP in those years the electorate of Gregory became a seat held by the Country Liberal Party. As we know, politics is a funny business. From 1899 to 1957 that was a Labor held seat. In those days it did not matter who held the seat; it was about representing the people.

As the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier said today, when Wally became a minister in 1969 he quickly became very instrumental and active in seeing that western Queensland took advantage of power electrification. He was involved with people like Sir James Walker in Longreach who was on the electricity commission at that time. It was people of that calibre and with that vision that enabled that part of the world to be on an equal footing with the rest of Queensland today.

Wally Rae served in the RAAF from March 1940 to August 1946 as a flight lieutenant. He gained commendations for meritorious service as a coastal command pilot in England, Africa and Gibraltar. He returned to Australia in 1944 as a test pilot at Amberley RAAF base.

One of the funny stories that his nephew David Heath recited to me this morning was when Wally became a test pilot at Amberley he said to the blokes who were assembling a plane one day, 'Who are the blokes who put this plane back together?' A couple of fellows very gingerly put their hands up and said, 'We did, Sir.' He said, 'You blokes can come with me for a test flight.' As a result of that Wally reckons he had quality control forever after. That was just the character of the man.

Another of his great feats was that he was a renowned horseman—a horseman of absolute quality. He had a beautiful seat on a horse. As a young person I can remember Wally Rae riding at shows and seeing him in action. He was very highly regarded in western Queensland for his equestrian riding, campdrafting and rodeos. He was able to do an exhibition campdraft for the Queen Mother in Sydney. He was riding his famous horse Sandy Mac. This was a horse that he had great love and affection for. In later years he did a lot of equestrian riding and his favourite horse then was a horse called Alibi. His life revolved around livestock, horses and people. I think that is a reflection of the quality and calibre of the man.

David Heath told me the story this morning about when David first came out to Blackall 40-odd years ago. He came with Wally. Wally said to him, 'Son, get your gear together; we're leaving early in the morning.' They left Sydney about 6 o'clock in the morning. I think it took them 10 days to get to western Queensland. Wally pulled up at every pub on the way and had a drink and David said that he sat in the car. I had a session with Wally at the Commercial Hotel in Longreach about 10 or 12 years ago. I have to say that he had a cast iron constitution. He loved a drink. He loved a scotch. There are probably many people in this House here today who knew the old gentleman.

Unfortunately, after Wally Rae broke his hip just before Christmas last year, we saw the run-down of his life. He certainly really enjoyed life to the full. One of the great things of his life was that he drew the Ramsay Park property at Blackall in a land ballot in 1959. He loved that property. His nephew David Heath and his wife, Helen, reside at Ramsay Park today. I want to say this on behalf of the people of the Gregory electorate and the people of rural and remote Queensland, for that matter: Queensland is a better place because of people of the likes of Sir Wally Rae. Wally Rae is a legend. Many of us aspire to be of that nature, but we never will be. Thanks for the memories, Wally. Thanks for the fun. Thanks for the larrikinism and thanks for just being you. He was a champion of all of the people—regardless of their political persuasion, regardless of their colour or their creed. We all loved you, Wally. You are an absolute champion bloke. Thanks for the memories.