



Speech By  
**Tim Nicholls**


**MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD**

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Record of Proceedings, 17 August 2016

**MOTION OF CONDOLENCE**

**Hewitt, Mr NTE**

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.12 pm): I join with the Premier in supporting the motion of condolence moved in the House today. Today the House is paying its respects to one of its most distinguished and long-serving members, Neville Hewitt. It is indeed appropriate that his great-niece Lisa has joined us in the parliament today to hear this condolence motion.

Neville Hewitt represented Central Queensland in the Legislative Assembly for nearly a quarter of a century. For those of us who have been here for less than that time, that seems like a lifetime. He served in various ministries for over 11 years. As has been indicated, in May 1956 Neville Hewitt was elected as the member for the electoral district of Mackenzie. Indeed, he was the last surviving member of the 1956 parliament. That means that he served in parliament when Vince Gair was still premier; in 1957 he witnessed the split within the ALP; on 12 June of that year, he participated in the defeat of the Labor government on the floor of parliament; and he saw the election of the Nicklin government, which was the first non-Labor government in Queensland in 25 years. They were indeed historic times. Indeed, the historic series of photographs appearing in Clem Lack's significant work, *Three decades of Queensland political history*, record Neville Hewitt sitting on the rear opposition bench in parliament during the critical vote as to whether the Gair government would be granted supply. At the time of his retirement from parliament in 1980, he was one of only two members who had served throughout the entire period since the election of the Nicklin government in 1957. The other was none other than the then premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Neville Hewitt's passing represents not only the loss of a much-respected and admired former member of this House but also the loss of a link with this state's rich political history.

Neville Hewitt was typical of his generation. Born on a Theodore cattle property in 1920 and raised in Central Queensland, Neville Hewitt maintained a lifetime relationship with the land and the rural communities of the area. On 12 October 1941, at the age of 21, he enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force and was posted to No. 150 Squadron of the RAF as a flight sergeant air gunner. It was in that capacity, after the squadron had been posted to the Mediterranean, that his Wellington bomber was shot down over Tunisia in 1943. As a consequence of that action and his efforts to rescue fellow crew despite his own injuries, he was awarded the Military Medal in recognition, as his citation read, of 'initiative, courage and fortitude after bailing out'. His medal was presented by His Majesty King George VI at Buckingham Palace on 17 October 1944. Neville Hewitt also has the distinction of being awarded the Air Force Medal.

After his discharge from the Air Force in September 1945 with the rank of flying officer, he returned to Central Queensland where he worked as a stockman and as a branch manager for that well-known company Australian Estates Company. In 1956 he was elected as a Country Party member to the Central Queensland seat of Mackenzie, which was based on the Dawson, Isaac and Mackenzie

River valleys. Mackenzie was the only ALP seat to change hands between government and opposition at that election. Whereas the ALP enjoyed a 10 per cent margin in 1953, Neville Hewitt managed to whittle that away with, as the Premier has indicated, a stunning 46-vote winning margin three years later. I am sure that a night in the car was a very small price to pay for that victory.

Neville Hewitt began a distinguished parliamentary career that, after a few little setbacks, in 1969 saw him elevated to the Bjelke-Petersen ministry as minister for local government and marine activities. He served as a minister for over 11 years in a variety of portfolios covering such responsibilities as conservation, Aboriginal affairs, lands and forestry. However, it was as minister for water resources that he made his mark. His period as minister saw the construction of a succession of dams throughout Queensland, including the Fairbairn Dam, the Fred Haig Dam, the Glenlyon Dam and the EJ Beardmore Dam. It should also be noted that, in his last year as minister, Neville Hewitt introduced the legislation for the construction of the Burdekin Dam, as the Premier has stated. That is a legacy of which he and his family can be truly proud. Having seen his electorate of Mackenzie abolished in 1972 and replaced by the electorate of Auburn, which covered much of the western Burnett, Neville Hewitt continued to represent the area for a further eight years.

Upon his retirement in 1980, the then deputy premier and treasurer, Dr Llew Edwards, said—

Mr Neville Hewitt is a good friend to all of us. He is a very popular member and one who has played a tremendous role in caring for the country people of Queensland ... I say without a shadow of doubt that no other member understands the rural problems as well as Neville Hewitt. His hard work for rural people and his good companionship have left a great mark on this Parliament.

I also note with interest that last month the *Morning Bulletin* recorded former ALP member for Rockhampton, someone well known to many of us in this place, Robert Schwarten as saying—

He was as straight as a gun barrel. Respected on both sides of the house, he was a true gentleman and a very sad loss to society.

Neville Hewitt enjoyed a long retirement from politics, returning to the land, managing cattle properties in Central Queensland, pursuing his interest in racing and remaining involved in community affairs. Neville Hewitt's epitaph is written in the rural and regional communities he represented and championed for nearly a quarter of a century. Through his own imagination and hard work, he sought to make Central Queensland a more productive region and, through reform and development, sought to bring prosperity to his fellow Queenslanders.

Neville Hewitt's wife, Nancy, predeceased him, but on behalf of the opposition I convey to his family, through Lisa, who is here on their behalf, our condolences at the passing of a father, a grandfather, a great-grandfather and a distinguished former member of this House.