




Speech By
David Crisafulli

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Harper, Hon. NJ

 **Mr CRISAFULLI** (Broadwater—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.34 am): Neville Harper, whose passing we acknowledge today, represents a significant group of former members of this House who enlisted in the armed forces, returned from overseas service, and took up land under the Soldier Settlement Scheme to open up tracts of rural Queensland and raise their families. Neville Harper represented the former electorate of Auburn from 1980 to 1992 and served his community, his party and this House with distinction over many years.

Born in Brisbane in 1926, Neville Harper attended state primary schools before undertaking secondary education at Brisbane Grammar School. Prior to his final senior examinations he enlisted in the RAAF and was accepted for aircrew training; however, delays in commencing this training led to him joining the Royal Australian Navy on 1 February 1945 in the last months of the Second World War. He achieved the rank of sub lieutenant and left the Navy in 1947, though he returned to the Navy and served on HMAS *Culgoa* in 1952 as a member of the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve.

At the completion of this service, he embarked on a career centred on Queensland's agricultural and pastoral industries. He spent time managing properties in Central Queensland before commencing employment with the significant stock and station firm Mactaggarts. It was while he was employed by Mactaggarts in Cunnamulla that he entered a War Service Land Settlement Scheme ballot at Wandoan. He was successful and fulfilled his dream, as he described it, of 'yearning to have property of my own'. When taking up his block, a set of tools and a tent for accommodation were delivered by the state government to the railway station for collection. It was from these humble beginnings that Neville Harper developed his brigalow scrub block, initially with dairy cattle and, as the dairy industry became less attractive, as a beef cattle stud. In an internet interview for the Wandoan RSL Neville Harper described his approach to the development of his property as 'first things first; then you just keep going'.

He began to take an active interest in community affairs and politics as well as developing a valuation practice specialising in Land Court matters. His public service began when he served on the Taroom Shire Council from 1976 to 1982. At the same time he engaged in a wide range of community activities in the area. He held significant positions in the Country Party and National Party at both local and state levels and was particularly dedicated to increasing party membership throughout the state. In the late 1970s he served as state vice-president of the National Party.

He was elected as the member for the seat of Auburn, which is now covered principally by the electorate of Callide and parts of Gregory. As the representative of an area in which agricultural industries and mining were coming into conflict, Neville Harper was conscious of the need for the interests of the agricultural sector to be protected so that the rights of private landholders would not be disadvantaged. In parliament he advocated for the need for access to reliable water supplies, the extension of railway electrification, greater financial support for local government, and the promotion of schemes to encourage young people to engage in rural employment.

In one of his final speeches in this House in 1992 he spoke of the need to preserve the constitutional arrangements as set out at Federation and spoke out against the gradual increase in power by the federal government. He said—

In the development of our Constitution 100 years ago, our intelligent and most perceptive founding fathers obviously had a fundamental concern in regard to the distribution of power—perhaps, in the main, the distribution of power between the proposed federation and the States. The architects of our Constitution were at pains to provide within its framework safeguards against the abuse of power.

In 1983 Neville became minister for justice and attorney, a position he held until 1986 and which he described as ‘the most rewarding part of his political career’. During this period he saw the creation of an independent director of public prosecutions, set in train moves to appoint a solicitor-general independent from Crown Law, and initiated significant law reforms.

Between 1986 and 1989, Neville served as minister for primary industries and, in the final days of that government, as minister for land management—both positions allowing him to draw on his extensive experience in the community. It is interesting to note that Neville Harper’s brother, Bob, served in this House as the member for Mount Ommaney in the 1990s representing the Liberal Party—one of the few instances in which siblings have held seats in the Queensland parliament.

We welcome Neville’s wife, Karen, and other family members to the House today. We appreciate the fact that you helped him fulfill his goals, both in this place and in the wider community. Neville Harper made a significant contribution to this House and to politics in Queensland. More importantly, he contributed to his community from the time he took up that soldier settlement block in Wandoan. His record of service is one worthy of recognition and the opposition is privileged to support this motion today.