




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 15 February 2024

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Harper, Hon. NJ

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (9.53 am): It gives me great honour to rise and contribute to the condolence motion for Neville Harper, former National Party member for Auburn from 1980 to 1992. Firstly, my sincerest condolences to his wife, Karen, and his daughters, Sally and Louise, and the extended family. I also stand in this chamber today as someone born and bred in and around the Guluguba-Wandoan region, where my family still resides and an area proudly represented by Mr Harper from 1980 to 1992. I have to continue to call him Mr Harper because that is how I knew him as a child, and I feel that it might be rude and my parents might say I should not if I was to do otherwise.

Prior to becoming the local MP, Neville served on the Taroom Shire Council from 1976 to 1982 alongside my father, Don Stiller. I can recall being in the ute with Dad driving between home, which was situated in the Downfall area, all the way up to Wandoan, hammering in signs for the election of Mr Harper. I will not say where they were hammered into, because I do not think we are allowed to do that to trees anymore. I also recall him attending Guluguba State School as our local member of parliament, and my parents tell me he was very active in our local Wandoan community. As a returned serviceman, he enjoyed Anzac Days, visits to local schools and he worked very hard along with wife, Mardi, for Legacy, selling their Christmas plum puddings. Mr Harper's name is rightfully included on the Queensland parliament War Service Honour Board.

In the early 1950s, as we have heard, Mr Harper was one of 103 settlers who went to Wandoan as part of the settlement scheme after being successful in that Wandoan land ballot. As minister for justice and attorney-general, he wrote the foreword for the booklet published by Mrs Mardi Harper and Mrs Lois Ryan about the history of the soldier settlements in the Wandoan region. He stated—

I take pride in having been one of those ex-sailors, soldiers and airmen who were brought together by their common practical experience in working the land ...

I pay tribute to the women who were prepared to make do with hurricane lanterns, with wood-fired coppers and the hundred and one other hardships which went with 'starting from scratch' so that their very limited capital could be used to develop productivity.

He went on to say—

It is a great pity that such a large section of Australia's population today does not appreciate that leisure and modest luxury is the reward for that productivity, a reward which productivity alone can justify.

Over time, Mardi and Neville Harper developed and improved the block at Wandoan, turning it into a beef cattle place. Their daughter, Louise, and son-in-law, John Oakman, are running that block today.

Mr Harper was very heavily involved in the local RSL, but in particular the RSL which was then the RSL Wandoan Bowls Club. He was a foundation member of the bowls club, and I thought it quite telling when I called Mum to talk about what I should say for Mr Harper's condolence motion today, she was at the bowls club with Dad. I thought that was really quite special. Mr Harper also was very involved in the commencement of starting the Wandoan gymkhana which has turned into the pony club. My own

electorate covers Toogoolawah. Mr Harper opened the Toogoolawah Court House. He also, along with one of the big dam builders, opened the Canna Dam, a beautiful skiing spot, and he also opened the Taroom Hospital.

Mr Harper was a member of the National Party and chairman of the Wandoan branch. In 1976 he was elected vice-president of our Queensland party. During his 12 years as local member, he served across several ministries, including minister for land management, minister for primary industries and minister for justice and attorney-general. He was also leader of the House. With his rural knowledge, he was a good fit as the minister for primary industries and had taken keen interest in the research and very important development of a vaccine for tick control.

In 1984, while serving as the minister for justice and attorney-general, he established the independent Director of Public Prosecutions. In a speech made by him as the then attorney-general, Neville Harper said—

I am sure all honourable members will agree with me that there should be little or no delay in placing criminal cases before the court. In order to achieve a speedy and competent prosecution service, the Government has agreed to my recommendation that the prosecutions function of the Crown law office should be separated from other legal functions undertaken on behalf of the Government.

This was described as the first dramatic change to Crown Law since its creation some 125 years prior. Mr Harper also appointed more senior judges to the District Court and Supreme Court and appointed executives to lessen the administrative load of senior judges.

Mr Harper was also responsible for legislation including a new Building Societies Act and the development of a secondary mortgage market board. He was a member of the parliamentary criminal justice committee and was the shadow attorney-general and opposition spokesperson for employment, training, industrial relations and public service.

On behalf of my family, and the people of the greater south-west, thank you, Mr Harper, for your service. Thank you to Mr Harper's family for giving us Mr Harper, for giving us your time and effort so he can do the job in representing us.

Neville John Harper died in Alexandra Headland in Queensland on 29 September 2023, aged 97. May he rest in peace.