

**CHRISTOPHER JOHN BAKER**

*Condolence Motion*

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Premier)** [12.02 pm] — without notice: I move —

That this house records its sincere regret at the death of Christopher Baker and tenders its deep sympathy to his family.

I would like to speak to the condolence motion for the late Christopher Baker. I start by paying my respects to Mr Baker's loved ones who are in the Speaker's gallery today. To Mr Baker's wife, Sarah, and son, John, I extend my deepest condolences. Along with the member for Vasse, I place on the record our appreciation for Chris's contribution to public service. That service was not limited to this house. He was actively involved in community groups, the WA Liberal Party, was an accomplished legal professional and a councillor for the Cities of Joondalup and Wanneroo.

Born and raised in Brisbane, Chris studied law at the University of Queensland, as did former Premier Mark McGowan. He was employed as a barrister and solicitor and went on to practise in Darwin, Katherine and Esperance before settling in Joondalup, a place he clearly loved and cared about and where he chose to live with his wife and two children upon settling in Western Australia. Although he was an assiduous practitioner of the law, he was also actively involved in the community. He was a founding member of the Joondalup Brothers Rugby Union Football Club and a member of other sports clubs from wrestling to rowing to rugby league to surf lifesaving. As a fellow rugby tragic, I commend his efforts to build the sport of rugby in WA, which was somewhat of an uphill battle over the years. He was a member of the Wanneroo Joondalup sub-branch of the Returned and Services League of Australia from 1996 and he participated in business associations and residents' associations.

His actively engaged life led to his preselection to run in the new seat of Joondalup at the December 1996 state election. He was successfully elected and served in the Court Liberal government's second term of office. As member of Parliament, he served on several committees, including a stint on the Public Accounts Committee and as Chair of the Select Committee on the Misuse of Drugs Act. At the 2001 election, he lost the seat of Joondalup to Labor's Tony O'Gorman. However, he swiftly nominated for the City of Joondalup council and served at a time of some turbulence at that local government. In 2019, having moved to Yanchep, he successfully sought election in the north ward in the City of Wanneroo.

It is clear from the many tributes that have flowed since his passing that Chris was well regarded and a well-loved man. He was a friend to many and an astute individual committed to public service. Regardless of where you sit on the political spectrum, communities need more people like Christopher. Fellow local mayors, council colleagues, friends and family have all had some beautiful things to say about him, from Albert Jacob to Linda Aitken to Tracey Roberts, all of whom counted him as a friend.

I was heartened to read some of the more personal information that the Liberal Party shared with my office. Since retirement, he enjoyed travel with his wife, Sarah, packing up the four-wheel drive and caravan for getaways. I am told that he was travelling with Sarah the week before his unexpected passing. However, he made sure that he was back to fight for his local community at a special meeting of council. He was prosecuting the case for better public open space in the Quinns Rocks area only days before he passed away. It is clear that he was absolutely dedicated to finishing the job. In fact, another example of this when he was still practicing law in 2018. According to the story, he experienced a serious cardiac arrest before he was due to appear for a client at the Supreme Court. Instead of calling an ambulance or driving to hospital, he went to court, successfully finalised the matter and then drove himself to the emergency room. I do not recommend this as a presence of priorities!

The role of being a member of Parliament is a very important one and I know we all take it very seriously, but it is also one that we should acknowledge. We take the opportunity to acknowledge Christopher Baker's service in this place today. I conclude by thanking Chris for his dedication to his local community and send my warm condolences to Chris's friends and family.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [12.06 pm]: I rise to support the Premier's condolence motion for Christopher Baker. Chris Baker, as he was more commonly referred to by the broader community, was both a stalwart supporter of the Liberal Party and a community activist after arriving in Western Australia from the Northern Territory in 1989. He was born in Brisbane in 1958. His father was a businessman and his mother was a nursing sister. In 1976, he graduated from St Joseph's College in Brisbane and gained a Bachelor of Arts–Bachelor of Law from the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology. In 1986, he moved to Darwin to work for the Crown Law Department. From 1987 to 1989, he managed a law firm in Darwin and Katherine. It was in Katherine in 1988 that he married Sarah, commencing a devoted and happy marriage. In 1989, Chris and Sarah moved to Esperance where he managed a law firm until establishing his own practice in 1990, based in Port Hedland, Broome and Joondalup.

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Having briefly been a member of the National Party in Esperance, Chris then joined the Liberal Party in 1990 and was president of the Port Hedland branch and secretary of the Kalgoorlie (North) Division from 1991 to 1995. He was elected to the Port Hedland town council in 1994 and served until 1996 when the family relocated to Joondalup. This was the year when the Liberal Party was selecting a candidate for the revived district of Joondalup, carved from the very large district of Wanneroo that had been won by Wayde Smith in the 1993 election. Wayde had sought selection for Joondalup, but owing to his involvement in serious controversies during the time as a councillor in the City of Wanneroo, his preselection was rejected by the Liberal Party at a state council. Fresh nominations were called and Chris Baker won the selection from a large field of candidates. Chris rallied support among local branch members and fought a vigorous campaign. In December 1996, he was elected as the member for Joondalup by a majority of 2 434 votes, or 55 per cent—an increased pro-Liberal swing of four per cent on the 1993 result. In his first speech in March 1997, he strongly endorsed private enterprise, deregulation and small business as the best foundation for employment.

Chris was an energetic local member and a confident debater in Parliament. From 1997 to 1998, he chaired the Select Committee on the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981, and was firmly opposed to normalising the illicit drug use that he saw as enabling organised crime.

Following the 2001 election result, Chris established the Joondalup law firm Chris Baker and Associates. He continued in public life on his election to the City of Joondalup, winning the Marina ward by 61 per cent. He served until 2004, when the Gallop ALP government suspended and dismissed the Joondalup council.

Chris Baker actively supported a range of community organisations, both during and after his parliamentary service. From 1997, he was secretary of the Joondalup Citizens Advice Bureau; and in 1998, a member of Safer WA for Children and Young People and the Joondalup Drug Action Group. He was a member of the Joondalup Business Association from 1994, serving as its marketing and membership director; a member of the Joondalup Combined Community Groups Association from 2004; and later, a member of the Wanneroo Chamber of Commerce.

Chris was a member of several sporting clubs and, notably, also a founding member, patron and life member of the Joondalup Brothers Rugby Union Football Club. From 1999 to 2001, he was a vice-patron of Surf Life Saving WA.

Chris returned to local government in 2019 when he topped the poll to win a seat in the North Coastal ward of the City of Wanneroo. He continued his active membership of the Liberal Party and, in 2021, when the last commonwealth electoral redistribution shrank the division of Pearce to the City of Wanneroo, he stepped up to serve as president of that Liberal Party division.

Chris was actively serving his community when he died suddenly and tragically at his Yanchep home on 4 August. Chris Baker's strong ethical and community values sustained him as an active member of Parliament and as a well-regarded councillor in three different local governments. He was a much loved member of the broader community. We know of his significant legacy of public life.

We extend our deep condolences to Sarah Baker, her daughter Michelle, her son Jon, their partners Peter and Nicola, and her two grandchildren. I acknowledge Sarah and Jon, who are in the gallery today. We recognise the gaping hole that losing Chris has left in your lives. We know how much he meant to each of you, as well as the broader party, including the Liberal Party.

Rest in peace. Vale, Chris Baker.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [12.13 pm]: Today we gather to reflect upon and celebrate the life and achievements of Christopher John Baker. Born in Brisbane in 1958, Chris made Western Australia his home, leaving an indelible mark on its political and community landscape.

He exemplified public service, first as the inaugural MLA for Joondalup from 1996 to 2001 and, subsequently, as a councillor for the City of Joondalup and the City of Wanneroo.

Before entering the fray of politics, Chris was a respected figure in the legal community, practising law in Darwin, Katherine and Esperance in the 1980s. His legal acumen was not just confined to the courtroom; he leveraged it to establish his law firm, Chris Baker and Associates, and earned the title of notary public from the Supreme Court of Western Australia.

In Parliament, Chris was an active voice on several committees, most notably the Public Accounts Committee. Post his tenure in the Legislative Assembly, the people of Joondalup reaffirmed their faith in him, electing him as their councillor for the Marina ward in 2001. He was known for his unwavering dedication to governance and the protection of the Western Australian lifestyle, values he championed throughout his political journey.

Beyond his formal roles, Chris's commitment to the community was profound. Over the years, he served as a patron and honorary solicitor for numerous local sporting, charitable, cultural and seniors groups in Wanneroo and Joondalup. After a brief period in the National Party, he joined the Liberal Party. His association with the party was deep, serving as president of the Pearce division and state executive member. Chris Baker was more than a politician

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or solicitor; he was a beacon of dedication, passion and community spirit. His passing has left a void, but his legacy will undoubtedly inspire others to come.

Our thoughts are with his wife, Sarah, and their family during this time of sorrow.

**MR M.J. FOLKARD (Burns Beach)** [12.15 pm]: I too wish to talk on the condolence motion for Chris Baker. Chris and I had an absolute passion for rugby. We often talked about his time down at the Joondalup Brothers Rugby Union Football Club. I remember a particular game when my son was playing in reserve grade. We both had a good chat and teased one another about the result of the game.

In recent times, I came to know Chris through his opposition to and protection of Quinns Beach, next to the surf club. I often saw him listening to and defending the views of the local community about the construction project. We may have been poles apart politically but his care for the community and his hostility against taking away beach access from the local community needs to be recognised.

Vale, Chris. He will be missed.

**The SPEAKER:** I request that all members rise for a minute's silence in order to carry the motion.

Question passed; members and officers standing as a mark of respect.