



# Aboriginal Western Australian MPs

There have been seven Aboriginal members of the WA Parliament, as of 2021. On 23 February 1980, Ernie Bridge made history as the first Aboriginal person elected to a lower house of an Australian parliament. He won the seat of Kimberley in the Parliament of Western Australia. In 2001, the first Aboriginal woman, Carol Martin was elected to the WA Parliament for the Kimberley electorate. In 2006, Ben Wyatt was elected to the seat of Victoria Park and became the first Aboriginal treasurer in an Australian parliament. Josie Farrer was also elected to the Kimberley seat in 2013. In 2017, Zak Kirkup won the seat of Dawesville and in 2020 became the first Aboriginal Leader of the Opposition in the WA Parliament. At the 2021 election, two Aboriginal women were elected: Divina D'Anna who won Josie Farrer's Kimberley seat and Rosetta (Rosie) Sahanna who became the first Aboriginal woman to win a seat in the Legislative Council. All were or are members of the Australian Labor Party, except Zak Kirkup who was a member of the Liberal Party.



*"...I have always stood  
for ordinary Australians;  
in other words, the  
battlers...Never let go of  
the obligations we have  
to look after the interests  
of ordinary Australians  
because they make up  
Australia; they are  
Australians. Not only are  
they Australians, but also  
we are all Australians  
together."*

Mr Bridge MLA  
Valedictory Speech  
Hansard

23 November 2000



*Personalities - Ernie Bridge, WA Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, 1988*  
National Archives of Australia: A6135, K1/8/88/4

## First Aboriginal Member of Parliament

### Ernie Bridge

Ernest (Ernie) Bridge (ALP) was the first Aboriginal person elected to a lower house of an Australian parliament. He contested and won the seat of Kimberley in the Parliament of Western Australia on 23 February 1980. He was also the first Aboriginal cabinet minister when he was appointed the Minister for Water Resources, the North-West and Aboriginal Affairs on 25 July 1986.



State Library of Western Australia

*The press doorstep Ernie Bridge outside Parliament House [1990] by Evan Collis*  
Photograph courtesy of State Library: BA1622/155

### Carol Martin OAM

Carol Martin (ALP) made history by becoming the first Aboriginal woman elected to an Australian parliament. Martin was elected to the seat of Kimberley in the Parliament of Western Australia on 10 February 2001. During her parliamentary career, Martin was Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Education and Health, and a member of the Parliamentary Services Committee. Martin retired from the Parliament on 9 March 2013. On 12 June 2023 she was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for 'service to the WA Parliament, and to the Indigenous community'.

## First Aboriginal Woman Member of Parliament



*Carol Martin*  
Photograph:  
Parliament of Western  
Australia, circa 2001

## First Aboriginal Treasurer: Hon Ben Wyatt MLA

Ben Wyatt (ALP) is the first Aboriginal treasurer in an Australian parliament.

Benjamin Sana Wyatt was born 1 April 1974 in Wewak, Papua New Guinea. He is the son of Cedric Morgan Wyatt, CEO Jigalong Community, and Janine Nowotna, teacher and librarian. He was educated at Kalgoorlie Catholic Primary School, Christian Brothers' College, Kalgoorlie Primary School, St Columba's College and Aquinas College.

After school, Wyatt studied law at the University of Western Australia. He then received a Masters degree with distinction at the London School of Economics. In 1996, he graduated from Duntroon Military College. He served as an officer in the Australian Army from 1996 to 2000. He was awarded the Town of Victoria Park Young Australian of the Year in 2001.

From December 2004 to January 2006, Wyatt was Counsel Director of Public Prosecutions (WA). He then joined a private practice as a barrister and solicitor.

Wyatt married Vivianne Truscello, daughter of Salvatore and Amalia Truscello, at Burswood, WA on 13 January 2007. They have two daughters.

At a by-election on 11 March 2006, Wyatt was elected MLA for Victoria Park, representing the Australian Labor Party, following the resignation of the Hon Dr Geoff Gallop, former premier. Wyatt was re-elected in 2008, 2013 and 2017. He has held the positions of Shadow Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Federal State Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, Native Title and Government Accountability. When Labor won government at the 2017 election, Wyatt was appointed treasurer, a position that he held until his retirement at the 13 March 2021 election.

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*How do we ensure that all Western Australians share in our economic wealth and have access to basic citizenship entitlements such as education, health, power, water, environmental health and security?"*

Mr BS Wyatt MLA, Inaugural Speech, Hansard, 29 March 2006

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*Ben Wyatt*

Photograph by Frances Andrijich, Parliament of Western Australia, 2017



## Second Aboriginal Woman WA MP: Josie Farrer



*Mick Murray and Josie Farrer chatting in corridor*  
Photograph by Frances Andrijich, Parliament of Western Australia, 2017

*"I would like to finish my speech with the following words in my language — [Words spoken in Gidja language — Please, Rangka, Rangka perne perrem-pe Jarrak-ngarri ngenan. Wanyakem Kaapuwa purren-kili yurriyangem waranja!]  
In English it is translated as —  
Please listen, listen to the words I am saying. We need to stop what's happening to our young people because they are our future."*

Ms J Farrer MLA, Inaugural Speech, Hansard, 17 April 2013

Josephine (Josie) Farrer (ALP) was born on 24 September 1947 in Halls Creek, Western Australia. Prior to Parliament she was Shire Council president and councillor at Halls Creek for 16 years. On 9 March 2013, she was elected as the MLA for Kimberley, the second Aboriginal woman in the WA Parliament in succession to Carol Martin who retired. She was re-elected in 2017. Farrer was a strong advocate for her community of the Kimberley and was instrumental in WA Parliament passing an amendment to the Constitution in 2015 to include recognition of Aboriginal people. Josie was also the first person to speak her native language of Gidja in Parliament, which she spoke during her valedictory speech to Parliament in November 2020, accompanied by the sounds of didgeridoo. Farrer announced her retirement in 2020 and did not contest the state general election on 13 March 2021.

## Message Stick

In 2013, Josie Farrer became the first Member of Parliament to table a petition in the form of a message stick in WA Parliament. The 'Baton of Life' is crafted from a Kimberley medicine tree. The lines on the stick symbolise the number of family members lost to suicide by the Beagle Bay community in the Kimberley. The message stick is on display in the Aboriginal Peoples' Gallery at Parliament House, as a symbol for the need for suicide prevention.



## First Aboriginal Leader of the Opposition: Zak Kirkup

Zak Richard Francis Kirkup (Lib) was born on the 23 February 1987 in Subiaco, Western Australia to Robert Kirkup, civil contractor and Penny Hulston, pharmacy assistant. He attended Woodlupine Primary School in Forrestfield and Governor Stirling Senior High School in Woodbridge. After school, he became the first member of his family to study at university (Murdoch). In 2005, he was a volunteer for the Liberal Party at the WA state election. Kirkup has been Vice President of the Burswood and Millpoint branches of the Liberal Party. From 2006, he worked at the Liberal Party including the role of Deputy State Director (Campaign Support) and Principal Policy Adviser for Premier Colin Barnett from 2009 to 2014. In 2014, he moved to the private sector working as a Strategic Development Manager at BGC Australia. He also worked as a concrete form worker.

On 11 March 2017, Zak Kirkup won the seat of Dawesville in succession to Dr Kim Hames who had retired. He was the youngest member of the Legislative Assembly in the 40th Parliament. By May 2017, he set a parliamentary record by asking 596 questions on notice. Kirkup held numerous shadow ministries during his parliamentary career including Corrective Services; Health; Mental Health; Innovation & Disruptive Technologies; Aboriginal Affairs; New Industries; Federal-State Relations. He was also Manager of Opposition Business from 27 June 2019 to 24 November 2020. After Liza Harvey resigned as Leader of the Opposition, he stood for the position and won on 24 November 2020. Kirkup was defeated as the Member for Dawesville by Lisa Munday (ALP) at the general election of 13 March 2021, when the ALP won a record 53 out of 59 seats in the Legislative Assembly.

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*“When my father Robert was born in 1962, his Aboriginality meant that he would not have been counted as an Australian in the national census held four years after his birth. My family history is not unique. For centuries of European settlement, Aboriginal people have been discriminated against, segregated and oppressed because of decisions made where I stand today. I do not mention this to be controversial. We should never forget the past. However, I believe we are all far better served, in the spirit of meaningful reconciliation, by coming together as Western Australians.”*

Mr ZRF Kirkup, MLA, Inaugural Speech, Hansard, 16 May 2017

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*Zak Kirkup*  
Photograph by Frances Andrijich,  
Parliament of Western Australia,  
2017



## Divina D'Anna

Divina D'Anna (ALP) became the fourth Aboriginal person elected to the seat of Kimberley when she won on 13 March 2021 at the state election. In June 2023 she was appointed a Parliamentary Secretary.

Divina D'Anna was born in Broome, the eldest daughter of Albert and Deborah Cox. She is a Yawuru woman of multicultural descent: Filipino, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

## Fourth Aboriginal Member for Kimberley



*Divina D'Anna at her swearing-in ceremony in the Legislative Assembly, 29 April 2021*  
Photograph: Parliament of Western Australia, 2021

## Rosie Sahanna

Rosie Sahanna (ALP) became the first Aboriginal woman elected as a Member of the Legislative Council, for the Mining and Pastoral Region, at the state election on 13 March 2021. Her term commenced on the 22 May 2021. On 25 May 2021, she was appointed a member of the Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes review.

Rosetta Sahanna was born on 12 February 1960 in Broome, WA. Prior to her election, she was an operations manager. She has a Diploma in Business Administration.

## First Aboriginal Woman MP of Legislative Council



*Rosie Sahanna at her swearing-in ceremony in the Legislative Council, 24 May 2021*  
Parliament of Western Australia collection

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