



# Premiers of WA

## Big John Forrest: First Premier of Western Australia

Sir John Forrest was a surveyor, explorer and Western Australia's first Premier. He was born near Bunbury, Western Australia on 22 August 1847, the fourth child of William and Margaret Forrest. His father was a Scottish miller who migrated to Western Australia in 1842. He was educated at a government school in Picton, near Bunbury and later Bishop Hale's School in Perth. In 1863 he was apprenticed to TC Carey, Government Surveyor in Bunbury and by 1865 he was appointed as a Government Surveyor. At 21 years, John Forrest and his brother, Alexander Forrest as deputy, led an expedition around Lake Barlee and Lake Moore, WA to search for the remains of missing explorer, Leichhardt. In 1876 he was appointed Deputy Surveyor General. In the same year he married Margaret Elvire Hamersley, a member of Perth's elite, at St George's Cathedral in Perth. In January 1883, Forrest became Surveyor General and Commissioner of Crown Lands with a seat in the Legislative and Executive Councils. Forrest was 'Premier' and Colonial Treasurer from 29 December 1890 to 14 February 1901. He was a founding father of the Federation of Australia which involved drafting the Commonwealth constitution. On 30 March 1901 he was elected unopposed to the federal seat of Bunbury which he held until 1918. He held several Cabinet positions including defence, home affairs and treasury. In 1907 Forrest was acting Prime Minister. Due to illness Forrest resigned as Federal Treasurer on 27 March 1918. In February 1918 Forrest was recommended for a barony and in June he sailed to England to take his seat in the House of Lords. He died on board the troopship, *Marathon* off the coast of Sierra Leone on 3 September 1918. He was finally buried at Karrakatta Cemetery in 1919.



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Head & shoulders portrait of John Forrest  
Photograph courtesy:  
State Library of WA: BA1895/6



*"We are only on the threshold of prosperity...there is a great Australian nation, and we are part of it. We are destined in the future to dominate these great Southern Seas. We have in this great continent of Australia another Britain—another home for the English speaking race".*

John Forrest

Address, Perth Town Hall,  
10 January 1896

*"I believe the measure of any society is the way it treats its most disadvantaged and defenceless. The wealth of a few is worthless if, for others, the basic human rights they deserve are being undermined by laws, economic systems, or political and social policies, or simple indifference. Human rights are the building blocks of a democracy."*

Mr Roger Cook  
(Kwinana)

Inaugural Speech

Hansard

11 November 2008

## The Hon Roger Cook: 31st Premier

The Hon Roger Hugh Cook was born on 20 August 1965, Cottesloe, Western Australia, the son of Dr Hugh David Cook, a child psychiatrist, and Lynette Ada Owen, an early childhood educator. He was educated at Claremont Demonstration School and Scotch College. Cook graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (public administration) from Murdoch University and later achieved a Graduate Diploma in public relations from Curtin University. From 2006 to 2010 he studied for an MBA also at Curtin University. On 1 October 2010, he married Carly Lane in Queensland and they have one son and one daughter.

Cook has worked as policy coordinator, WA Aboriginal Native Title Working Group; CEO, Yamatji Marlpa Bana Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation; manager, government relations and communication, SW Aboriginal Land and Sea Council;

state manager, CPR Communication and Public Relations and as an electorate officer for Stephen Smith MHR, James McGinty MLA and Senator Chris Evans.

From 1999 to 2000 he was State president of the Australian Labor Party (WA). In 2008 Cook was elected the MLA to the new seat of Kwinana, and has been continually re-elected. Following the election he was immediately appointed Deputy Leader of the Opposition as well as Shadow Minister for Health, Mental Health, Indigenous Affairs. After the 2017 election Cook was appointed Deputy Premier; Minister for Health; Mental Health. In 2021 he was appointed Deputy Premier; Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade; Tourism; Commerce; Science. Following Mark McGowan's resignation, Cook was sworn in as Premier of Western Australia at Government House on 8 June 2023.



*"Roger Cook on his feet"*

Roger Cook as Deputy Premier, Legislative Assembly, 2017

Photograph: Frances Andrijich.  
Parliament collection.

## The Hon Mark McGowan: 30th Premier

The Hon Mark McGowan was born in Newcastle, New South Wales on 13 July 1967 to Dennis and Mary McGowan. He was educated at Casino Primary School, Casino High School and Coffs Harbour High School. In 1984, McGowan joined the Australian Labor Party. He studied law at the University of Queensland. In 1987, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and by 1989 he had received a Bachelor of Laws. He also completed a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice at the Queensland University of Technology.

After university, McGowan joined the Royal Australian Navy as a naval officer (legal officer). In 1991, he moved to Western Australia and settled in Rockingham. He became a Rockingham City councillor in 1994 and in 1995 he was elected Deputy Mayor. He was also elected President of the Safety Bay/Rockingham branch and the Brand

Electorate Council of the Australian Labor Party. Mark McGowan married Sarah Miller on 21 December 1996 in Fremantle. They have two sons and one daughter.

On 14 December 1997, McGowan won the seat of Rockingham in the WA Parliament. He was re-elected for every subsequent election until his resignation. His portfolios included the environment, climate change, education and training, tourism, racing and gaming, youth, disability services, Peel and the South West. McGowan served as Leader of the Opposition from 2012 to 2017. On 17 March 2017, he was sworn into the office of Premier when Labor won a landslide victory at the election. In 2021, he won the 13 March election with a record number of seats and took on the role as Treasurer as well as Premier. On 8 June 2023 McGowan resigned as Premier and the member for Rockingham.

*"It was a fact of life in the area in which I lived that if one's parents were wealthy, one was afforded opportunities and if they were not, one missed out. It became apparent to me then, as it still is, that it was through the actions of government or representative organisations - for example, the union movement - that ordinary people were afforded opportunities."*

Mr McGowan,  
(Rockingham)

Inaugural Speech

Hansard

11 March 1997

*"Off to vote: State Labor leader Mark McGowan with wife Sarah and children Samuel, Alexander and Amelia at the Rockingham Senior High School polling station to vote in today's State election."*

Picture: Nic Ellis  
Photograph courtesy of  
*Sunday Times*  
12 March 2017, p. 1





*"My pledge to this Parliament is that I shall continue to remain true to the principles of free enterprise and the free market and to work in support of the rights of the individual...Mr Speaker, I hope that over the course of my parliamentary career I might make a positive contribution to the economic and social development of Western Australia".*

Mr CJ Barnett,

(Cottesloe)

Inaugural Speech

Hansard

12 September 1990

## The Hon Colin Barnett AC: 29th Premier

The Hon Colin Barnett was born in Nedlands, Western Australia on 15 July 1950 to Coralie and James Barnett. He was educated at Nedlands Primary School and Hollywood Senior High School. He studied economics at the University of Western Australia, after first studying geology, graduating with honours. He later achieved a Master's Degree in Economics. In 1970 he received a cadetship at the Australian Bureau of Statistics in Canberra and from 1973-1975 he worked as a cadet research officer. He returned to WA to work as a senior tutor and lecturer at the School of Economics and Finance at WAIT (later Curtin University). Barnett was an economist with the WA Confederation of Industry from 1982 to 1985 and then executive director of the WA Chamber of Commerce until 1990. He was awarded the Centenary of Federation medal in 2003. Barnett is married and has four sons. Barnett won the seat of Cottesloe, in a by-election on 11

August 1990. His portfolios have included resources, state development, energy, tourism, education and treasury. From 1992 to 2001 he was Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the House in the Legislative Assembly from 1993 to 2001. He served as Leader of the Opposition from 2001 to 2005, and in 2008. Barnett led the Liberal Party to victory in September 2008. On 23 September 2008, he was sworn in as Premier. From 2008 to 2016 he was also Minister for State Development and from 2013 he was the Minister for Science. In 2016 Barnett added the portfolio of Tourism. In 2017 Barnett lost the election and he resigned his seat on 5 February 2018. On 12 June 2023 Barnett was awarded the Companion of the Order of Australia, "for eminent service to the people and Parliament of Western Australia, particularly as Premier, to economic and infrastructure development, to social welfare reform, and to the Indigenous community".



*"Premier Colin Barnett in his State Parliamentary suite, Havelock Street, West Perth, 26 February 2013"*

Colin Barnett, former Premier of WA was photographed by Philip Gostelow during an interview with *Australian Financial Review's* Perth bureau chief Jonathan Barrett.

Photograph courtesy of State Library of WA  
BA2493/45-46

## Premier's role: 'first among equals'

The Premier is the Head of Government of the State in Western Australia with executive power that is subject to the advice of the Cabinet. After a general election the Premier is the leader of the party, or coalition of parties, with a majority of the 59 seats in the Legislative Assembly. By convention the Premier is commissioned by the Governor to be the 'first among equals', as the leader of the Ministry or Cabinet, and form government. The Premier resigns if the party loses the support of the majority of the house.



*"Sir David Brand (left) and Jeff Newman at the 1973 Telethon at the studios of TVW7, Tuart Hill"*  
[Sir David Brand was Premier of WA from 1959—1971]

Photograph courtesy of  
State Library of WA:  
BA1119/P2094  
327331PD

The Premier has ministerial responsibilities and also coordinates the work of other ministers. In Labor governments, the Premier is the leader of the parliamentary party and is chosen by the Caucus (meeting of all elected Labor members). The Premier allocates portfolios to members who are elected to the Ministry by the Caucus. In Liberal and National Party coalitions, the Premier is usually elected by the parliamentary members of the main party in the coalition (Liberal Party). The Premier chooses the Ministry and allocates the portfolios. An agreement between the Liberal and National Parties determines the number of ministerial posts held by each party. The specifics of the Premier's role are:

- lead the government and coordinate administration in the state
- chair Cabinet meetings
- advise His Majesty The King on the exercise of powers and functions of the Governor
- select ministers and allocate portfolios (Liberal and Nationals) or allocate portfolios to ministers chosen by Caucus (Labor)
- set out the principal ministerial responsibilities of ministers and the Acts they will administer (through Executive Council)
- authorise a minister to perform the duties and functions of another minister
- advise the Governor on the opening day of parliamentary sessions and the proroguing of Parliament prior to a general election
- adhere to caretaker government conventions and practices following a general election announcement
- be the main communicator between the Governor and Cabinet, the WA Government and federal, state and territory governments, and between the WA Government and overseas governments
- as a Member of Parliament represent his or her electorate.

## Courtesy title

When Western Australia first commenced responsible government in 1890 the word Premier was merely a courtesy title as the position was not recognised constitutionally. However John Forrest adopted the title of Premier when he took office that year. Forrest's actual appointment was Colonial Treasurer.

The Constitution Act and the Constitution Amendment Act provide for appointment of the 'principal executive offices of the Government liable to be vacated on political grounds' but does not mention the executive office of Premier. Until 1917 the ministry lists published in the Government Gazette did not mention the office.

Sir James Mitchell, Lieutenant Governor-in-Council finally formalised the title of Premier on 3 April 1947 by declaring 'the office of Premier, Treasurer, Minister for Housing, Forests and the North-west' as one of the eight 'principle executive offices of the Government'. Mitchell then appointed the Hon Ross McLarty MLA as Premier. Subsequently the office of Premier has been listed as the head of every government of WA.

## Premiers of Western Australia

No	Name	Party	Period of Service
1	Sir John Forrest	Forrest	20 December 1890 – 14 February 1901 (10 years, 1 month, 16 days)
2	George Throssell	Forrest	14 February 1901 – 27 May 1901 (3 months, 13 days)
3	George Leake	Opposition	27 May 1901 – 21 November 1901 (5 months, 25 days) 23 December 1901 – 24 June 1902 (6 months, 1 day)
4	Alfred Edward Morgans	Ministerialist	21 November 1901 – 23 December 1901 (1 month, 2 days)
5	Sir Walter Hartwell James	Liberal	1 July 1902 – 10 August 1904 (2 years, 1 month, 9 days)
6	Henry Daglish	Labor Independent Labor from 1905 Liberal from 1908	10 August 1904 – 25 August 1905 (1 year, 15 days)
7	Sir Cornthwaite Hector Rason	Liberal	25 August 1905 – 1 May 1906 (8 months, 6 days)
8	Sir Newton James Moore	Ministerialist	7 May 1906 – 16 September 1910 (4 years, 4 months, 9 days)
9	Frank Wilson	Liberal	16 September 1910 – 7 October 1911 (1 year, 21 days) 27 July 1916 – 28 June 1917 (11 months, 1 day)
10	John Scaddan	Labor Nationalist from 1917 Country Party from 1920 Nationalist from 1923	7 October 1911 – 27 July 1916 (4 years, 9 months, 20 days)
11	Sir Henry Bruce Lefroy	Liberal Country Party from 1920	28 June 1917 – 17 April 1919 (1 year, 9 months, 20 days)
12	Sir Hal Pateshall Colebatch	Liberal (1912-1923) Nationalist (1940-1948)	17 April 1919 – 17 May 1919 (1 month)
13	Sir James Mitchell	Liberal to 1917 Nationalist subsequently	17 May 1919 – 16 April 1924 (4 years, 10 months, 3 days) 24 April 1930 – 24 April 1933 (3 years)

## Premiers of Western Australia continued

No	Name	Party	Period of Service
14	Philip Collier	Labor	17 April 1924 – 23 April 1930 (6 years, 6 days) 24 April 1933 – 19 August 1936 (3 years, 3 months, 26 days)
15	John Collings Willcock	Labor	20 August 1936 – 31 July 1945 (8 years, 11 months, 11 days)
16	Frank Joseph Scott Wise	Labor	31 July 1945 – 1 April 1947 (1 year, 8 months, 1 day)
17	Sir Ross McLarty	Nationalist Liberal from 1945	1 April 1947 – 23 February 1953 (5 years, 10 months, 22 days)
18	Albert Redvers George Hawke	Labor	23 February 1953 – 2 April 1959 (6 years, 1 month, 10 days)
19	Sir David Brand	Liberal	2 April 1959 – 3 March 1971 (11 years, 11 months, 1 day)
20	John Trezise Tonkin	Labor	3 March 1971 – 8 April 1974 (3 years, 1 month, 5 days)
21	Sir Charles Walter Michael Court	Liberal	8 April 1974 – 25 January 1982 (7 years, 9 months, 17 days)
22	Raymond James O'Connor	Liberal	25 January 1982 – 25 February 1983 (1 year, 1 month)
23	Brian Thomas Burke	Labor	25 February 1983 – 25 February 1988 (5 years)
24	Peter M'Callum Dowding	Labor	25 February 1988 – 12 February 1990 (1 year, 11 months, 18 days)
25	Dr Carmen Mary Lawrence	Labor	12 February 1990 – 16 February 1993 (3 years, 4 days)
26	Richard Fairfax Court	Liberal	16 February 1993 – 16 February 2001 (8 years)
27	Dr Geoffrey Ian Gallop	Labor	16 February 2001 – 25 January 2006 (4 years, 11 months, 9 days)
28	Alan John Carpenter	Labor	25 January 2006 – 23 September 2008 (2 years, 8 months, 20 days)
29	Colin James Barnett	Liberal	23 September 2008 – 17 March 2017 (8 years, 5 months, 22 days)

## Premiers of Western Australia continued

No	Name	Party	Period of Service
30	Mark McGowan	Labor	17 March 2017 – 8 June 2023 (6 years, 2 months, 22 days)
31	Roger Hugh Cook	Labor	8 June 2023 –



## Facts on Western Australian Premiers

The first Premier of Western Australia was Sir John Forrest (Forrest), who was Premier from 1890 to 1901.

The youngest Premier in WA when sworn in was John Scaddan (Labor), aged 35 years in 1911 .

The oldest Premier in WA when sworn in was John Tonkin (Labor), aged 69 years in 1971.

The only Premier to also be a Governor of Western Australia was Sir James Mitchell (Liberal and Nationalist)

The longest serving Western Australian Premier was Sir David Brand (Liberal) who served for 11 years, 11 months and one day from 1959 to 1971.

The longest serving Labor Premier was Phillip Collier who served for nine years, four months and one day (not consecutively) in the 1920s and 1930s.

The only father and son Premiers in WA were Liberals Sir Charles Court (1974-1982) and Richard Court (1993-2001).

The only Premier to die in office in WA was George Leake (Opposition) who died of pneumonia on 24 June 1902.

The shortest time served by a Premier in WA was one month by Hal Colebatch (Liberal) in 1919. He was also the only Premier to also have been a member of the Legislative Council.

The first woman Premier in WA and Australia was Dr Carmen Lawrence (Labor) from 1990 to 1993.



*Premier Frank Wilson [fourth from the right] and others at Government House, Perth [1916-1917] [The youngest Premier in WA, Hon John Scaddan is sixth from the right.]*  
Photograph courtesy of State Library of WA: BA533/468 4517B/2

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