

**HON DESMOND KEITH DANS**

*Condolence Motion*

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.01 pm] — without notice: It is with great sadness that I move —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Desmond Keith Dans, a former member of the Legislative Council for the South Metropolitan Region; places on record its appreciation for his long public service; and tenders its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

I did not have the opportunity to know or work closely with Hon Des Dans but I did take the opportunity to talk to a number of his former colleagues, all of whom held him in the highest regard. It is not always the case, Mr President, that in this business of politics, which sometimes can be a bit nasty, people from different groupings hold the same view of one of their former colleagues, but it is the case in respect of Hon Des Dans. He was described by everyone I spoke to as being a team player; driven to pursue a real policy agenda; not here just to fill a space or hold a seat; generous with his time and advice to those who were new and coming into the system; he knew he was here for a purpose; and he recognised the privilege it was to represent people in this place and he enjoyed it.

Hon Des Dans was born on 24 November 1924 and passed away on 2 January this year. He was 89. He enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy Reserve in 1942 and served in the Pacific. He was a member of the Seamen's Union of Australia. He was a storyteller and he did tell tales of his time as a young man travelling to ports all over the world. He commented in later years on the changing nature of the world and how, when he was a young man, every city and every port was markedly different. But he noted over time that the world was becoming more homogenised and that all the ports started to look the same.

He joined the Labor Party in 1958 and he played an important role in his time at the Seamen's Union to bring the union back into the Labor Party. He worked in the north west. He knew and loved the north west of this state, and he campaigned hard to win the seats in that area for the Labor Party. He learnt much in his time as an official of the Seamen's Union, and that included the skill of campaigning. It included how to negotiate through really hard and difficult disputes and how to keep union membership strong against attacks from all corners, including royal commissions aimed at but unsuccessful in destroying the waterfront unions. He learnt how to cross the t's and dot the i's so that the deal he did today could stand the scrutiny and the test of time. He applied an ethical and robust approach to these campaigns and to his negotiations, and that stood him in good stead when he had to negotiate some of the trickier elements of what he did in his parliamentary life, including the establishment of Burswood Casino and a clampdown on illegal gambling when he was minister for that portfolio later on.

He was elected an MLC in 1971 to the equivalent of what is now the South Metropolitan Region, and he served in that capacity in this place until 1989. I am told that he was loyally assisted in his parliamentary career by his long-term electorate officer, Judith Fellows, and I am advised that, between the two of them, they pretty much knew everything that was going on in this place. I am told that Judith was "old school", which I think is code for a bit scary! But I am told that between them they made the perfect combination in this place.

He served as Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council from 1976 to 1983, and Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council from 1983 to 1984. As a leader he was avuncular and generous, and he was leader at a time of some giant personalities in Parliament, yet he held his own. He could give as good as he got from the other side but he maintained excellent working relationships with everyone in Parliament. He was tough but he was a genuinely happy bloke who loved what he did. Indeed, he was himself one of the political giants in this place.

As a minister, he held the portfolios in the areas of industrial relations, works and services, tourism, racing and gaming and water resources. In the industrial relations area he oversaw changes to occupational health and safety that dramatically improved workplace safety in Western Australia. As Minister for Works and Services with Special Responsibility for the America's Cup, it was indeed fitting for him as he spent much of his work and life in and around Fremantle, and the changes that the America's Cup brought to the port town were in no small way as a result of his work. He resigned from the ministry in 1987 and was appointed to set up and chair the port operations task force.

He is survived by his wife, Rikki; his children, Jody and Peter; and his grandchildren, Elle, Keely, Elizabeth, Cullen and Bella. I am told that he had a lifelong love affair with his wife, Rikki, and was very proud of his children and grandchildren. Indeed, some members today may know his son, Peter, who is a well-respected public servant.

The *Seamen's Journal* of 1971 recorded the time that he transitioned from union official to a member of Parliament. There are some, Mr President, today who would seek to demonise those of us who worked in unions before we came to this place—they would have us be embarrassed or ashamed by that work and would describe that work and those who perform it as somehow corrupt or illegitimate. Hon Des Dans's farewell to his union, when he was moving to become an MP, reminds us that the work is indeed honourable and that important social change was achieved by union members and those who worked for and with them. He talked in particular of the role of the Seamen's Union in drawing attention to the horrors and the lies about the Vietnam War and about the penal code. I will refer to the *Seamen's Journal* of June 1971. In his response to his comrades wishing him well for his future as a Labor parliamentarian, he said —

Tonight is a moment I have dreaded; the comrades who are seated at this table are multiplied by many more on the ships, comrades who would stand as men among any company; I have known them for many years and I do not want to break that link. Indeed, I want to continue with my union, I want to remain doing some useful service for my union. If we look at the opponents of Labor they are people who when they enter the legislature retain firm links with those they came from. I deeply want to retain my trade union links and work in the interests of my union and in support of it.

Further in that same speech to his colleagues, Mr President, he said —

I remember an old seaman, Jack Patience, saying at a C.O.M.-Reps'. Meeting that he believed in peace because he wanted to live. This, perhaps, is the force that drives people on to fight for peaceful co-existence and a better life, rather than live an inactive life, a life that will give nothing to the present or future generations.

Des Dans was testament to the range of people skills and leadership learnt by leading members in the union movement and testament to how those skills can be transferred to the drive for policy, and to managerial and leadership skills as a member of Parliament and, indeed, later as a minister. It is telling about the man to also quote from his valedictory address to this place, in which he said —

Unlike the previous two speakers, I have been looking for this day for some time. I feel no tinge of remorse nor nostalgia because during the course of my lifetime I have been engaged in a number of different areas and I have learned not to look back.

...

I have not met anyone in the Parliament, no matter what his political view, who has not tried to do his best for the people he represents. Some of us may have different views on how people work, but I do not think I have ever come across anyone who came in here only for the buggy ride.

Hon Des Dans was a Labor leader, a Labor hero, and he was indeed a giant in the time of giants in this place. He was a lovely fellow, a team player and good bloke. Those are the words of those who knew him well and worked with him. I am only sorry that I too could not have known him.

On behalf of the Australian Labor Party, I send my condolences and best wishes to his family and friends on their loss.

**HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [3.11 pm]: I stand on behalf of the government to support the condolence motion for Hon Des Dans. Desmond Keith Dans was born in Perth on 24 November 1924, the son of a miner and station manager. He was educated at Highgate Convent, Christian Brothers College in Kalgoorlie and the Kalgoorlie School of Mines.

Like many other young men of his generation, he stepped forward to serve Australia in the Second World War by enlisting in the Royal Australian Naval Reserve before his eighteenth birthday. As a stoker he served on several ships in the Pacific theatre until his discharge in March 1946. In civilian life he joined the merchant marine, leading to his involvement in the Seamen's Union and his employment as its secretary from 1959 to 1971. He joined the Australian Labor Party and served on the party's state executive from 1959 and led his union to re-affiliate with the ALP.

With the retirement of Hon Fred Lavery from one of the two South Metropolitan Province seats in the Legislative Council, Des Dans was endorsed by the Australian Labor Party to contest the seat at the 1971 state election. The province consisted of the Legislative Assembly seats of Fremantle, Melville and Cockburn, held by the ALP, and the seat of East Melville, held by the Liberal Party, which did not even field a candidate in 1971. Des Dans was elected with an absolute majority of 3 000 votes, 52.8 per cent against the Democratic Labor Party and an Independent, the late Shirley de la Hunty. Six years later at the 1977 election, in an unfavourable climate for his party, Des Dans was re-elected by 3 200 votes in a straight fight with the Liberal Party. He gained a third term in 1983, when he defeated his Liberal opponent by over 23 000 votes—nearly 70 per cent of the vote—at a

time when South Metropolitan Province consisted of the seats of Fremantle, Melville, Cockburn and Rockingham.

In the Legislative Council he served as government and opposition Whip from 1973 until 1976, when he succeeded Hon Ron Thompson as Leader of the Opposition. Des Dans led the Australian Labor Party in this chamber for 11 years until 1987, as Leader of the Government after the 1983 election. From 1983 until December 1984 he was the Minister for Industrial Relations, subsequently holding the portfolio of Tourism, Racing and Gaming until February 1986. He was then Minister for Works and Services with Special Responsibility for the America's Cup, retiring from the Burke cabinet in March 1987. The America's Cup in January–February 1987 was the first time the cup had not been defended by the New York Yacht Club. It was a defining event for our state and for the City of Fremantle and it is appropriate that a minister with a maritime background, representing Fremantle, was involved in these preparations.

Hon Des Dans left Parliament in 1989 and enjoyed a long retirement, maintaining his involvement with the East Fremantle Yacht Club and the South Fremantle Football Club, passing away at the age of 89 on 2 January 2014. We convey our sympathy to Mrs Rikki Dans, his children, Jody and Peter, and their families.

**HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary)** [3.14 pm]: I stand on behalf of the Nationals WA—National members present and from past eras—to support the condolence motion for Hon Des Dans, and to express our sympathy on his passing to his wife, Rikki, to whom he was married for over 60 years, and his daughter, Jody, and son, Peter, and their extended family. Having read briefly some of the speeches and heard a bit about Hon Des Dans, I know that he obviously formed very strong friendships in the chamber as well as outside the chamber. Having read through some of the speeches, I found that one of those members he formed a strong friendship with was Hon Mick Gayfer, a Nationals MP from the wheatbelt, with whom I am sure he had many strong and boisterous debates both inside and outside the chamber. Given some of the views that Hon Des Dans expressed in some of his speeches, one debate would have been around the statement that he did not agree with having an upper house and we could quite easily do without it. I am sure that Hon Mick Gayfer would have had a long and arduous debate with him on that viewpoint.

We also see in his final speech that he mentioned pressing, some years earlier, the then Premier Sir Charles Court to recognise that we should be putting resources and visits into Asia to build relationships. He was making the point 25 or 30 years ago that we are part of Asia and we should be strengthening our relationships to ensure we build a trading relationship into the future. In some ways, Hon Des Dans saw Asia as very important to our economy and he was pushing to make the most of those opportunities for the state. I also see in perhaps one of his final speeches in this place that he said he was very much in favour of the two-party system. Standing here as a National, a minor party in the make-up of the current membership of this house, I know he would find strong debate now, just as he did with Hon Mick Gayfer in years gone by, both in this place and the corridors.

He was obviously a man with strong beliefs who fought hard for those beliefs and his constituents, the people who supported and elected him. We should be very thankful for the service that Hon Des Dans gave to the people of Western Australia, not only as a serviceman during World War II but also to this Parliament for over 18 years. We say thank you to his family for their support of him over those years of duty, often in positions of high responsibility. I should think they would be very proud of their husband, father and grandfather in the service that he delivered to the people of Western Australia. On behalf of the Nationals, our best wishes go with his family.

**HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [3.18 pm]: I also wish to add some words in support of the condolence motion for Hon Des Dans. Unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to know him as well as some of my predecessors, but I certainly saw him around the party in the first few years I was a member and in my first few years as a union organiser. Members have only to read his first and last speeches to see that he obviously had a very interesting life. He had a love of the sea that carried through from when he was a very young man to his final years. I am not sure where he gained that, having grown up in Kalgoorlie, but we all know Kalgoorlie people gravitate to water, so I think that ongoing passion served him well. I know that when I started as a trade union organiser in 1984, he was the Minister for Industrial Relations, and the most significant piece of legislation we dealt with around that period was the occupational health and safety legislation, which he had carriage of. I must say that members on this side are immensely proud of the work he did as a Labor man and former trade union official in that space, because it created an immense change in workplaces across Australia.

It is a piece of legislation that has stood the test of time. It is a living document that we hope will continue to evolve and improve over time. However, certainly that piece of work and contribution he made in that space has made a major difference to working people's lives in our state. We have only to look at the work he has done in the portfolio of tourism, particularly looking at the changes made with the Burswood Casino being set up and the

changes that occurred as a result of the America's Cup in Fremantle. Both play significant parts in the South Metropolitan region today; both are significant tourism attractors in our state. I know that in the later part of his life Mr Dans was a life-long resident in Fremantle and certainly would have seen the post-America's Cup changes himself. We only have to go back pre-cup to see that Fremantle had become a big daggy. Therefore, through the changes, and by making sure that the cup was held there, it certainly gave a great boost to the area—changes that we enjoy to this day.

Obviously, when we look at his work in the trade union movement, having brought his experience through from the Navy to act on behalf of seafarers, and then when we read his first speech, we see the ongoing interest in all things related to transport. I know that my colleague Hon Ken Travers shares that passion. I know that when we read the final speeches of members, sometimes there is a lot of regret about what people could or should have done, but that does not exist in the final speech that Hon Des Dans provided. He talks about not having had any regrets and looking forward; that he actually enjoyed and had fun being in this place. I think that is something that we all try to do. It is a very healthy and positive attitude, and obviously that attitude was reflected in the outcomes that he was able to deliver for the people in our state.

I pass my condolences on to his wife, his children and his grandchildren. Hon Des Dans is a great representative of a period that has now probably passed us by. I think they were a group of trade union officials who were different in the way they operated and in the way they had grand visions. They may not necessarily have had the education that a lot of our members or trade union officials have today, but they certainly had the vision. They used to cut through the barriers to achieve that vision, either for their members in the workplace or for their broader community. When we look back at all the things that Des Dans was able to achieve across the range of portfolios, he certainly did achieve a lot for his party, his community and his family. His was a life well lived, and a man whom we can certainly no doubt respect and give our thanks for.

**HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan)** [3.23 pm]: I, too, want to join with colleagues in the house who have passed on their condolences to Hon Des Dans' family for their sad loss. However, we should also celebrate and commemorate his contribution to Western Australia. As members have pointed out, he made a significant contribution as a member of Parliament, a union official and also a minister of the Crown. The Labor Party had many former union officials who came from transport backgrounds; he was one of them. Many members would recall the rail stories of Fred McKenzie. In Des Dans' case, it was around the maritime industry. It is interesting to note when one goes to look at the inaugural speech of Hon Des Dans, people would actually believe he was a member for regional Western Australia because he talks very much about the north west of the state. However, as we go through it, we understand that it is about arguing and calling for an enhancement of the state's shipping services in Western Australia. He was very proud of the history of the Labor Party in contributing to the state's shipping service in the past. At that point, he was calling for a further expansion of the state's shipping service, and it is with some regret that we no longer have a state shipping service. I wonder what Hon Des Dans would say in this place today if he were still here. We all can read his inaugural speech to get a very good idea of how he would have viewed the matter, given that many of the issues he raised back then are still prevalent today.

One of the things that is telling when we do a bit of research about the history and the role of Hon Des Dans is that he was able to look forward and not just back to see where the future lay. In fact, even in terms of the issues that he was raising back in 1971, a lot of it was around containerisation and the changing nature of the shipping industry. Of course, we all now would look back at that and just see that as history, but he could clearly see what was coming down the track.

The other thing that Des Dans will be remembered for in his contribution to the tourism industry. Many have made the point about his role and involvement in the America's Cup. Of course, the other thing is that he was the member who was responsible for putting through this house the bill that created the WA Tourism Commission. I also just wanted to bring to the attention of the house one small thing that shows how members of this place are often given challenges in areas that they may not be necessarily accustomed to and then go on to do great things, as Hon Des Dans did. In the debate of 22 November 1983, when the WA Tourism Commission bill was being put through this place, in responding to a number of comments that had been made by members in the other house, Hon Des Dans made a comment when referring to a number of meetings that had occurred prior to the election at which the decision was taken to establish the commission. He said —

I was present at the time, although I readily admit that tourism is not one of the things in which I am vitally interested.

I think it is quite interesting to see his comment at that stage, and then to look at the history and contribution that he then undoubtedly went on to make.

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Col Holt; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Darren West;  
President

---

Another area in which I think he was able to predict the future of where things would go was, again, in that same debate. The issue came up about the creation of the tourism commission, and the fact that one of the other members, Hon Phil Pandal, had suggested that he would have no objection to the appointment of agents for tourism in Singapore, Auckland or London. By way of interjection, Hon Des Dans pointed out that Tokyo was one of those places, and that the Japanese were the most travelled nation in the world at present. Of course, we all know that Japan would later become one of our major tourism markets and that the tourism commission, which Des Dans was involved in the creation of, would place a very strong focus on the Japanese market in the promotion of tourism in Western Australia. Clearly, he is a person who stayed very strong to his ideals. He set a standard for those of us in this chamber, particularly those of us who are Labor members, in terms of the goals and aspirations that we aspire to. It is people like Hon Des Dans who went before us who certainly—in my case—give me great inspiration in trying to achieve the levels that they did in terms of their commitment to the community and to transport issues.

I want to acknowledge his fantastic contribution, and, with my colleagues, pass on my sincere condolences to all his family, particularly Peter Dans, who is known to many of us in this chamber as someone who regularly has attended estimates hearings. To all of his extended family and friends, who I am sure are missing him greatly at this point in time, my deep and sincerest condolences. However, to Des Dan: a life well lived and a great contribution!

**HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural)** [3.29 pm]: Much of what I had to say about the passing of Hon Des Dans has already been mentioned. I would like to make a small point. As a young, aspiring member of Parliament, I did a lot of research into members who had come before me in this place, and during my inaugural speech I mentioned the contribution that those members had made. One such member that I distinctly remember doing some research and study into was Des Dans. Something I noted from his earlier speeches, as Hon Colin Holt pointed out, is that he had a quick wit and made some very sharp comments, which I think were admired by all. He seemed to add a bit of theatre to Parliament. One of my favourites that I plucked out was from a debate involving Hon Mick Gayfer. Hon Des Dans was talking about the need for leadership and how the great leaders of old would have been somewhat dismayed by the poor level of leadership that they saw at that time. I do not quite know who he was referring to or what the debate was about but someone interjected “John Curtin”, and Hon Des Dans said that John Curtin would be dismayed with the leadership. Mick Gayfer interjected “Billy Hughes”. Hon Des Dans said to him, “Hon Mick Gayfer is a lot older than me; I don’t go back quite that far.” There was a certain level of quick-witted humour in a lot of his speeches, which always livens up debate and adds some colour to what can sometimes be dreary debates in the Parliament.

Like everybody else, I would like to acknowledge the contribution that Hon Des Dans made. Projects such as the Burswood Casino and Hillarys Boat Harbour were heavily influenced by him. He was Minister for Works and Services with Special Responsibility for the America’s Cup. His contribution to tourism during that time was enormous. He was a very proud union official. He was the secretary of the Seamen’s Union of Australia when it merged with the Federated Ship Painters and Dockers Union to become what is today known as the Maritime Union of Australia. He kept very close ties with the union movement. As some of the speakers before me have said, it is becoming unfashionable to denigrate unions and point out their negatives. People like Hon Des Dans did much to go the other way in these discussions and made very real and important contributions to the lives of union members and the workers of Australia.

I thank Hon Des Dans for his contribution to public life. I also thank him for inspiring all of us who aspire to follow in the footsteps of great men like him. Like the previous speakers, I wish to convey our best wishes to his family.

**THE PRESIDENT (Hon Barry House)**: I have the honour of being the only remaining current member of this chamber to overlap service with Hon Des Dans. I served with him in this chamber for about 18 months—from 24 October 1987, when I was first elected, until 21 May 1989, when Des Dans started his retirement. While I did not get to know him very well during that time, I saw the respect that he commanded and was afforded in this place by all other members and staff. In that time he sat on the government benches where Hon Nick Goiran sits today. We should keep in mind that there was bench seating at that time—the old format. Hon Des Dans was clearly the elder Labor Party statesman in this chamber. He obviously had a lot of credibility and influence on his colleagues on both sides of this chamber and across the whole political spectrum and proceedings in this place.

I particularly recall one humorous incident involving Hon Des Dans. It was a very late sitting—about 3.00 am. Thankfully, we do not have many of those legislation-by-attrition episodes today but in those days, unfortunately, it was quite a common occurrence. Hon Des Dans and a few others had been openly snoozing for some time during a very long-winded, tedious debate which oppositions occasionally resort to in the vain hope

that something may change dramatically and they can manage to make a point that will magically change the view of the government or the cross benches and the legislation will be defeated. There were no cross benches in those days apart from the National Party but I do not think it classified itself as a crossbench party at that stage. Hon Phil Lockyer was on my side of proceedings at that stage. He was a well-known prankster and joker. He was in the chamber at the time and noted that Hon Des Dans and several others were taking a bit of a kip during the proceedings. He wrote a note to Hon Des Dans and asked one of the chamber attendants, Phillip Ugle, to deliver it to him. Phillip was a bit of an institution when it comes to the history of this place. He was a wonderful chamber attendant who was admired and loved by all people across the whole spectrum and he served this chamber extremely well for a long time. Phillip delivered the note to Des Dans and woke him up. At that stage the Leader of the Opposition was Gordon Masters. I cannot remember whether it was Gordon or one of the two frontbenchers—Phillip Pental or Norman Moore—who had been speaking rather laboriously for a long time. The opposition member was on his feet and he was going to sit down very soon, so he asked through the note for Des Dans to get the call and have a few bars on the bill for about five minutes. It was signed “Joe Berinson”, who was the Leader of the House at that time, and of course knew nothing about the situation. He sat on the front bench about where Hon Helen Morton sits today—in bench seating, of course. Hon Des Dans was startled at being woken up. When he read the note, he was pretty alarmed as he obviously did not have much knowledge of the bill that was being debated. He certainly had no clear knowledge of what had been said in the chamber for the past hour or so. In his half-awake state, he lurched out of his seat to have a word with his leader, Hon Joe Berinson, in front of him, who, as I said, knew nothing about what was going on. Unfortunately for Hon Des Dans, in his half-awake stupor, he did not navigate the step too well and ended up in a very untidy heap in the passageway. He was not hurt but it attracted instant attention across the chamber and halted proceedings. It provided great mirth to Phillip Lockyer and a couple of others who were in on the joke. It brought proceedings to a halt for a while as the situation was cleared up and Hon Des Dans understood what had happened and realised that he had been set up. It is worth noting that the debate collapsed soon after, a vote was taken, the legislation passed and everybody went home laughing. Perhaps there is a message there that a good way to get progress in this chamber may be to resort to humour and lighten things up sometimes rather than the usual adversarial, antagonistic way.

On this sad occasion, I want to join all the members who have spoken and all the members of this chamber in stating that Hon Des Dans served this state very well. He served this state in the Navy in World War II, he served in the merchant navy and marine industries and he served as a union member and organiser. He served as a long-term Labor Party member and official. He served as a member of this Legislative Council from 1971 to 1989—18 years. During that time and until his death, he was heavily involved in community organisations such as the East Fremantle Yacht Club and the South Fremantle Football Club. He held very significant roles in the chamber, as Whip, as a shadow minister in various capacities in opposition and as the leader of his party, as Leader of the Opposition and then Leader of the House. He served as a minister in several portfolios, which have been mentioned, in government. He is perhaps best known for his central role in Western Australia hosting the America’s Cup in 1987 and the establishment of the Burswood Casino in the 1980s.

I certainly congratulate Hon Des Dans on his marvellous service to the state and his contribution to life in Western Australia. I am sure he will be sadly missed by his family, friends and this institution. I will pass on our condolences to his wife, Rikki, who incidentally sent me a very nice note in response to a letter I sent to her and her family from all members and staff of the Legislative Council upon Des’s death. As usual, we will provide a *Hansard* copy of this condolence motion to Mrs Dans and her family. With that, members, I will put the motion.

As is usual practice, I ask members to stand in their places and observe a minute’s silence.

Question passed; members standing.