

HON SANDY LEWIS

Condolence Motion

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [2.02 pm] — without notice:
I move —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Sandy Lewis, a former member of the Legislative Council for the Lower Central Province, and places on record its appreciation for his long public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to members of his family in their bereavement.

Alexander Ashley Lewis, known as Sandy, was born in January 1931 at Glen Osmond in Adelaide. He was the grandson of Hon John Lewis, a member of the South Australian Legislative Council from 1898 to 1923. His father, Lance, was a veteran of World War I who became the state managing director of Goldsbrough Mort and Co, and his mother, Grace “Gretta” Laidlaw, was a notable community worker. His uncle, Essington Lewis, was a long-serving managing director of BHP, and director of munitions and aircraft production during World War II. His elder brother, Tom Lewis, was later to serve as a cabinet minister and Premier of New South Wales from 1975 to 1976.

Having lost his father at an early age, Sandy Lewis was a boarder at St Peter’s College in Adelaide and passed many holidays on the rural properties of his extended family. He helped fight his first bushfire at the age of nine; it was the beginning of a deep, lifelong commitment to rural firefighting and fire prevention. Having attended St Mark’s College at the University of Adelaide without completing a degree in engineering, he turned his attention to farming at Dookie Agricultural College in Victoria, and later with his brother, Tom, in New South Wales.

In 1952 he moved to Western Australia. After working as a jackeroo and farm contractor, he began farming at Kojonup in 1955—the year he married his first wife, Patricia. Together they founded PS Agencies—standing for Patricia and Sandy—in 1961, and relocated to Boyup Brook in 1963. From this agency Sandy Lewis developed as a noted farm machinery dealer, winning the John Lynn Memorial Prize for his contribution to the building of this industry. Although he relinquished his personal business interests after entering Parliament, he continued to work to promote an industry essential to the farming community. Both in and out of Parliament he served as state and federal secretary of the Farm Machinery Dealers Association between 1977 and 2003.

Sandy Lewis joined the Moberup branch of the Liberal Party in 1954, and thereon was a staunch activist who thought nothing of driving Senator Shane Paltridge the long distance to address a meeting of 60 people—a large gathering for Moberup. He served as the divisional president of Forrest, as a state vice-president and as a member of the federal council. In 1966 he was one of 12 applicants for a Senate vacancy that was won by his lifelong friend, the late Reg Withers.

His strong personality is remembered from a dinner in Katanning in 1974, when many guests were grumbling at the actions of the federal Whitlam government. Sandy Lewis stood on the bar and proclaimed that instead of complaining, the only solution was to defeat the government at an election. He then placed an empty box on the bar, and by the end of the evening it contained \$20 000.

In 1972, Sandy Lewis was endorsed by the Liberal Party to contest the by-election for the Legislative Assembly seat of Blackwood, after its Country Party member of the Legislative Assembly resigned to contest the federal division of Forrest. Blackwood comprised the Shires of Capel, Donnybrook, Boyup Brook and Bridgetown, and was a strong conservative seat that was closely fought between the Liberal and Country Parties.

On 16 December 1972, Sandy Lewis gained 2 023 primary votes—39.5 per cent. After the distribution of Country Party preferences, he had a majority of 1 443—64.1 per cent. However, the district of Blackwood had already been slated to disappear in the 1972 redistribution, to be largely absorbed by the Labor-held seats of Collie and Warren. That same redistribution had significantly altered the Legislative Council Lower Central Province, previously a great southern-based electorate returning Country Party MLCs. It extended to the south coast to comprise the districts of Warren, Collie and Katanning. Sandy Lewis was confident that he could win this province seat for the Liberal Party, even though its three component Legislative Assembly seats were strongholds of the Australian Labor Party and the Country Party. At the March 1974 state election, Sandy Lewis polled 29.9 per cent of the primary vote, with 6 023 votes—141 votes ahead of the National Alliance candidate. He polled 1 300 votes more than the combined totals of his three fellow Liberal candidates standing in the Legislative Assembly. After preferences, he defeated the candidate of the Australian Labor Party by 2 372 votes—55.9 per cent.

Lower Central Province was a unique three-way marginal seat, with Labor consistently leading the primary vote count, and with Liberals and Nationals vying for second position and depending on each other’s preferences to win. In his inaugural speech to the Legislative Council on 31 July 1974, Sandy Lewis described Lower Central Province as “an electorate which includes pretty well everything we have going for us in Western Australia”. He

showed his commitment to the free market by arguing that only private enterprise could best develop the Collie coal deposits and by criticising the Potato Marketing Board. He urged the achievement of greater productivity through harder work, and called for the arts in Western Australia to receive a proper share of Australia Council funding. This speech set the scene for vigorous representation of his electors, together with his interest in broader questions. His practical advocacy for the arts was expressed by his strong contribution to the preservation of His Majesty's Theatre—a major initiative of Sir Charles Court's government.

In 1977 his Liberal colleagues elected him as secretary of the Parliamentary Liberal Party, holding that position with only a brief interruption until 1984. For nine years from 1977 he was a member of the Joint House Committee, and he was to chair several select committees dealing with conservation, recreation and resources.

Sandy Lewis would take great exception if a minister on either side of politics visited his electorate without the courtesy of notifying him. However, he would loyally and most effectively arrange a campaigning schedule for a visiting Liberal Party leader. Although he could be brusque and aggressive, he had been described as an effective behind-the-scenes peacemaker during the 1980s. He also enjoyed strong friendships with members of the Australian Labor Party, notably the late Fred McKenzie, MLC, and the late Tom Jones, member for Collie in the Legislative Assembly.

The National Country Party had retained the other province seat at the 1977 election, but in 1980 Sandy Lewis was comfortably re-elected with a majority of 1 850 votes over the NCP, and a final majority of 2 800 ahead of the ALP—56.1 per cent. In 1983, his campaign skills assisted in the election of Hon Bill Stretch, who won the second Lower Central Province seat for the Liberal Party in a very difficult election. He won a third term at the 1986 election, polling 34.9 per cent of the primary vote. He finished nearly 3 000 votes ahead of the National Party and enjoyed a final majority of 3 000 over the Australian Labor Party. Although the three component Legislative Assembly districts in the province had consistently remained in the hands of the Australian Labor Party and the Nationals, it had not prevented his remarkable record of electoral success.

In opposition after 1983, Sandy Lewis served as shadow cabinet secretary in 1983 and 1984 and again from 1986 to 1988. However, after the major redistribution of Legislative Council electoral boundaries that replaced the two-member provinces with the current regions, he was not selected as part of the Liberal Party team for the South West Region and retired from Parliament in 1989.

After leaving Parliament, he worked in the travel industry and was executive director of Western Australian Regional Manufacturers from 1990 to 2003. He was a strong advocate for prescribed burning and in 1994 chaired a ministerial inquiry into this matter.

In later years, while living in Baldvis, he campaigned for the Liberal Party at the 2007 Peel by-election and spoke forcefully at a Liberal state council meeting in 2010. Subsequently, Sandy Lewis returned to live at Victor Harbour in South Australia, where he still retained the energy to campaign on local issues. He died suddenly on 9 May in the arms of his daughter, Bronwyn, after a period of ill health.

The life of Sandy Lewis was commemorated at a memorial service in St George's Cathedral on 3 June. One eulogy was delivered by former MLC Phil Lockyer, who made the journey from Narrabri in New South Wales to pay tribute to Sandy's humour, forthrightness and generosity of spirit. The ringing statement of Liberal Party principles from the Menzies era entitled "We Believe" was printed as part of the order of service. As Bronwyn wrote, "Sandy lived the values of the Party he joined in 1954".

We express our deep sympathy to his daughter, Bronwyn, who has only recently lost her mother, and to other close family members. We also express our condolences to Mrs Tricia Lewis.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [2.11 pm]: I rise on behalf of the opposition to join the Leader of the House in expressing our condolences on the passing of former member of both houses Hon Sandy Lewis. As we heard from the Leader of the House, Sandy Lewis came from a strong political background and a strong and long Liberal pedigree in South Australia. We know that in his professional life before he entered Parliament, he was a farmer, agent and machinery dealer, and it was his contribution to the farm machinery industry itself that led to recognition for him in later years as well. He served both as an MLA for the seat of Blackwood from 16 December 1972 to 30 March 1974 and as an MLC for the Lower Central Province from May 1974 to May 1989.

The positions that he held while a member of Parliament tell us a bit about the nature of the man as well. He was secretary of the Parliamentary Liberal Party from 1977 to 1984 and secretary to the shadow cabinet from 1983 to 1984, and shadow secretary of cabinet with special responsibility for party liaison, campaign committee and special projects from December 1986 to April 1988. That tells us that he was a party man, working behind the scenes on the hard business of getting an opposition re-elected—and the even harder business, I suspect, of keeping party members happy. He held a range of positions before he entered Parliament, including jackeroo, trade cadet and farm contractor, a farmer himself, and then, as we heard, the founder and principal of

PS Agencies, established in 1961. He was also active as a firefighter, most recently recognised for his work in the bush fire brigades and in Baldvis where he was active in the community group protecting local bushland from bushfires. I want to talk a little bit about that later.

In his first speech, he was keen to point out that the agriculture industry needed to take a fresh approach to marketing. In fact, the words that he said then could just as easily be said now. He said —

Let us go out and market our agricultural products in the same manner as all other products are marketed. Let us sell through promotion and surveys of the markets, and modernise our concept of the marketing of rural products. When we do this we will have no overproduction because this country, with the markets it has on its doorstep in South-east Asia, will be able to supply the needs of those countries; and, strangely enough, in the years to come the European Economic Market will still be buying a great deal of our agricultural produce.

He was keen to modernise his industry; he did not want the industry to rest on its laurels and he was strong in his support of aggressive marketing.

I think he would have been an interesting person to know because of his sense of humour and perhaps his views about the role that banks play in our community. I looked at some of his contributions in *Hansard* and at one point he made a speech about taxing, and while referring to another member in the house, he said —

Mr Wells reminded me of the story of a farmer in the depression who went to his bank manager and said that his children needed clothes and shoes, and the poor little kids could not go to school in the wet weather as they did not have jumpers. The bank manager knew that the farmer was a bit of a gambler, and he thought if he gave him a few bob he would probably put it on a horse. The bank manager tried to test him out, and he said, “Well, you know, Joe, I’ve got one glass eye. If you pick which is my glass eye, I will give you the loan”. Quick as a flash, the cocky said, “It’s your left one”. The bank manager said, “Well, I don’t know how you did it. I have tried that trick with numerous people and they have never picked it before”. The cocky said, “It was easy. It was the one that had a hint of compassion in it”.

He sounds like a person it would have been good to know, and I am sorry that I did not know him. In his later years in Western Australia, in 2011, when he was interviewed by the local paper in Rockingham, when he was active in fighting bushfires around Baldvis, he said —

“All levels of government have failed to take enough interest in lowering the fuel load. I’m worried about Baldvis, but I’m worried about the whole State.”

Mr Lewis fought his first fire as an eight-year-old in Victoria, using a dray horse and water tanks with semi-rotary pumps and has fought fires in NSW and WA, having lived much of his adult life around Kojonup.

But he had also been involved in burn-offs to reduce fuel loads, saying many roadsides, special rural estates and private properties were, or had been, developed “next to tinderboxes”.

He went on to talk about the importance of managing fuel load.

On the passing of her father, his daughter, Bronwyn, is reported as saying that her father had entered politics to make a difference, loved his family, was an extremely loyal person and stood up for the underdog.

I do not know that any of us could ask for a better comment from a member of our family on our passing than that, so I join the Leader of the House in expressing our condolences to the families.

HON COL HOLT (South West — Minister for Housing) [2.17 pm]: I rise briefly on behalf of the Nationals to recognise the passing of Hon Sandy Lewis and the 17 years of service he gave to the Parliament—two years in the other place and 15 years in this very chamber. I also recognise his many years of service to his community, outside this place, which is where it always starts. Hon Sandy Lewis obviously started with a great background in community service and doing the right thing.

Members have talked already about his passion and commitment around the agricultural industries, but also his role in more recent years in bushfire control and bushfire mitigation, on which he held very strong views that he was never afraid to voice if he thought it was the right thing to do.

On behalf of the Nationals, I thank him for that service over many years, both inside this chamber and in his community. I also extend our thanks to his family who supported his service to his state and his community. Without a supporting family, it is that much harder for anyone to step into roles that are required by this state and leadership roles in the community. His family should be very proud of him—proud of his contribution to the state, proud of his leadership in the industries that he was passionate about, and proud of his contribution to the Parliament and his leadership in the community. Our condolences go to his family.

HON PHIL EDMAN (South Metropolitan) [2.19 pm]: I just wanted to say a few words about Hon Sandy Lewis. I was first introduced to him when he became a member of the Warnbro branch of the Liberal Party in the Brand division. No-one really warned me about Sandy. The first time I had the opportunity to try to answer some of his questions—I did not know who he was or his background—I wish someone had warned me. When we have branch meetings in the Liberal Party, members of Parliament have to answer any questions that branch members may have. Boy, I was not prepared for Sandy. I did not know anything in full detail about fuel loads or bushfires. I guess I was very passionate about roads, infrastructure, marinas and all sorts of things. I will never forget that, and walking out of that branch meeting alive. To his credit, Sandy took me under his arm very quickly. As much as I copped a bit of a bruising, I was very lucky to fly with Sandy. He took me to one of his meetings in Boyup Brook with Hon Nigel Hallett, where we faced 200 farmers who were angry about fuel loads. It was a good education for me because back then I had no idea about fuel loads or how detrimental they could be to farmers. I befriended Sandy after that and respected him for his passion and what he was trying to do, not only for Baldivis in the Brand area in Rockingham but also for the state.

Sandy was also a business owner; he had a machinery business for some time. He was secretary of the Bush Fire Front when I met him. Sandy, if you are around, rest in peace.

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Barry House): I also wish to say a few words and support the motion moved by the Leader of the House. I regret that I was unable to attend the service for Sandy a few weeks ago, but I am pleased to get the opportunity to say a few words today. I had the pleasure of serving in this chamber with Sandy Lewis for about 18 months after I was first elected. He had just rejoined the Liberal Party after a period as an Independent. At the time, Sandy was very dirty on Brian Burke and the Labor Party and equally dirty on Hendy Cowan and the National Party because just before I started in this place, legislation had been passed to change the electoral laws for the Legislative Council to go to its current system of proportional representation based on regions. The first general election on that basis was held in 1989. I found myself pitted against Sandy and several other members for preselection at that first general election in 1989. It is vivid in my mind that two members were at that preselection meeting—Sandy Lewis and Colin Bell. Both of them said, “I’m the only person equipped to be number 1 on the ticket, so take that or nothing”, so the preselection committee gave them both nothing. The ticket ended up with me at number 1, Muriel Patterson at number 2 and Bill Stretch at number 3. Sandy was very bruised not just about the outcome of that preselection. It turned out that he had been elected for a six-year term in 1986, which was curtailed by the passing of the legislation in 1987. Because he did not win preselection, his political career ended three years before he thought it should have ended. He had a fair justification in thinking that.

During the time I served with Sandy in this place, I appreciated his absolute devotion to his community and his tenacity. He tried again at the general election in 1993 and stood as an Independent. It rather shocked Sandy that he got a very poor vote and was nowhere near getting re-elected as an Independent. I guess that was a clear indication of how difficult it is under our system for an Independent without party status to win a seat in this house.

Sandy was a larger-than-life character in many ways. He loved a drink, and so did his wife, Trish. He was very gruff; he had a very gruff exterior. At first glance, Sandy was quite a formidable character. It took me some time to get used to that exterior, particularly after the bruising preselection in 1989 when he probably lined me up as the new boy on the block who had taken his position.

Sandy was good fun, good company and very shrewd in a lot of things that he believed in. I enjoyed particularly the Upper Blackwood Dinninup Show with him and Bill Stretch on several occasions. That is always held on the first Tuesday in November—Melbourne Cup day.

As has been mentioned, Sandy’s particular focus was on forest management and bushfire control. He was an extremely strong advocate for volunteer fire brigades and country brigades and how they operated and still operate. He was heavily involved in the farm machinery industry as a dealer and as the secretary of that association for some time. Of course, agriculture in general was his passion.

Interestingly, just a couple of days after his death, I was in Nannup to open and launch the Nannup Heritage Trail. The original statue of “Tich” Tomas, the first Australian killed in Vietnam, was unveiled by Sandy Lewis in 1988. It was quite reflective for me on that day to stand there and launch a heritage trail that incorporated the statue that had been unveiled by Sandy a long time ago.

Sandy always spoke of his strong business and political pedigree. He was very proud of the fact that his father was a founding father of Goldsbrough Mort and Co. His uncle, Essington Lewis, was involved in the core of BHP. His brother, Tom Lewis, was Premier of New South Wales. They were very important people in the development of not just agriculture, but Australia in general.

I extend my condolences to his daughter, Bronwyn, who was doubly hit because she lost her mother just a few days after Sandy's death. I extend condolences and best wishes to all his family and friends.

I invite members to stand in their places, as is the usual practice, to observe a minute's silence to support the motion —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Sandy Lewis, a former member of the Legislative Council for the Lower Central Province, and places on record its appreciation for his long public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to members of his family in their bereavement.

As is the custom, a *Hansard* copy of the debate on that motion will be forwarded to his daughter, Bronwyn, and other members of the family.

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