

History Notes: Presidents of the Legislative Council
May 2016. Updated June 2021.

Presidents of the LC

Chainman to president

Sir Thomas Cockburn-Campbell was born in 1845 in Exeter, England. He was the second son of Sir Alexander Cockburn-Campbell and his second wife, Grace Spence. When he was 19 years old, Cockburn-Campbell migrated to Australia and worked as a chainman (surveyor's assistant) in Queensland. He moved to WA and farmed near Mt Barker. In 1870, he married Lucy Anne Trimmer of Pootenup. Governor Frederick Weld nominated him to the part elective Legislative Council in 1872. He then won the seat of Plantagenet (Albany) in 1874. Cockburn-Campbell wrote for the *Western Australian Times* and in 1879 he gave up farming to become manager and part owner of the newspaper which was renamed *The West Australian*. In 1890, Governor Robinson appointed him to the new nominated Legislative Council and he was elected as the first President. Tragically on 27 September 1892, Cockburn-Campbell died in the Legislative Council building from a chlorodyne overdose, taken to induce sleep.



William Hancock and others

Thomas Cockburn-Campbell is seated in the middle, c1895
Photograph courtesy of State Library of WA (BA1886/425)



“Doubtless the mining resources of the colony were among its richest treasures and their development must be a matter of the utmost importance”

Sir Thomas Cockburn-Campbell

Inaugural speech,
Parliament of Western
Australia

Tuesday 1 July 1873

The Hon Kate Doust MLC: First Woman President

Catherine Esther Doust was born on 27 May 1962 in Kalgoorlie, WA to Barry Doust, postal worker and Esther Grogan, medical secretary. She was educated at many Catholic schools as her father was transferred to different post offices. The schools included St Anthony's, Narrogin, St Michael's, Kalgoorlie and Bassendean, Mercedes College, Perth and Our Lady of Missions High School in Fremantle. After school, she studied politics and industrial relations at the University of

Western Australia graduating with a Bachelor of Arts. On 14 January 1995, Kate Doust married state MP, Bill Johnston. They have three children.

Kate Doust has had a variety of jobs including shop assistant, cleaner, library clerk, insurance clerk and union official. In 1984 she was employed as a trade union official at the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association of Western Australia. She joined the ALP in the same

year.

Kate Doust was elected on 10 February 2001 to the Parliament of Western Australia for the South Metropolitan Region. In her inaugural speech she revealed that her interest in politics was developed by her grandfather, Jack Grogan who was a long-term member of the Labor Party and the Transport Workers Union. Instead of traditional bedtime stories, he recounted union disputes.

"I am a sixth generation Western Australian and have always been proud to reside in this State and celebrate that we live in a true democracy without fear of reprisals if we proffer an opinion that may differ from the opinion of others in the community, employers, religious leaders or members of the Government."

Inaugural Speech, Western Australian Debates (Hansard), Legislative Council, Wednesday 30 May 2001



President Hon Kate Doust, John Seal Pollard and Nigel Pratt, Legislative Council, 2019

Presidential first

On 22 May 2017, the Hon Kate Doust made history when she was elected the first female President of the Legislative Council in the Parliament of Western Australia. Her presidency ended on 21 May 2021.

From 2012 to 2017 she held shadow ministries in commerce, industrial relations, consumer protection, small business and science. From 2008 to 2017 she was Deputy Leader of the Opposition. She has also been a member of numerous standing committees.

The Hon Alanna Clohesy MLC: Second Woman President

On 25 May 2021, the Hon Alanna Clohesy was elected as President of the Legislative Council of Western Australia. She is only the second female President of the Western Australian Legislative Council.

Alanna Therese Clohesy was born on 21 August 1962 at Sea Lake, Victoria. Her mother, Vera was a single parent with six children, who later in life trained as a primary school teacher. Clohesy arrived in WA in 1999.

Clohesy graduated with honours from university with a Bachelor of Social Sciences (Social Policy). She has worked as the executive director of the Brain Injury Association of New South Wales and has also worked for Disability Australia.

Alanna Clohesy joined the Australian Labor Party circa 1988. She worked as an Advisor for a Labor Senator for Western Australia. She was also state Parliamentary Labor Party Secretary from 2 April 2013 to 15

March 2017.

Clohesy was elected as MLC for the East Metropolitan Region on 5 April 2013 for a term commencing 22 May 2013. She was re-elected 2017 and 2021. On 17 March 2017, Clohesy was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier; Minister for Health; Mental Health until 19 March 2021. On 22 May 2013, she was appointed Deputy Chair of Committees until 21 May 2017.

"But it is my belief that all people, particularly those who are most disadvantaged, have a right to services and support that provide them with opportunities and that improve their quality of life. That is what drives me. That is my light on the hill."

Inaugural Speech, Western Australian Debates (Hansard), Legislative Council, Wednesday 12 June 2013



"Dr Tony Buti MLA and Hon Alanna Clohesy MLC" 190th celebration of the Office of the Auditor General, 2 December 2019
Collection of the Office of the Attorney General

“In obedience to the Governor’s command...”

The president is the presiding officer of the Legislative Council. At the start of each new four year parliamentary term, the members of the House elect a president, “not of their own initiative, but in obedience to the Governor’s command”. The roles of the president are based on the Constitution Act 1899 but have also evolved from Westminster traditions and Western Australia’s political history. There are many similarities between the role of the president and speaker (who presides over the Legislative Assembly). The president applies the Standing Orders (rules) and practices of the Legislative Council. Both presiding officers must exercise fairness and political impartiality to all members, despite their political allegiance. They direct members in behaviour, language and dress. Presidents have rarely entered debate in the House, however before responsible government was created in 1890, presidents sometimes debated and voted on the floor of the chamber.



View of the Legislative Council after refurbishment in 2011

President’s role

The president’s tasks are to:

- apply Standing Orders (rules) and practices of chamber
- ask members to speak, ask questions, and move motions (of which they have been given notice)
- maintain order
- vote only in the case of a tie
- guide members in their behaviour, language and dress
- control visitors’ behaviour in the public gallery
- act as spokesperson for the Parliament
- administer Parliament House with the Speaker and managerial staff
- promote the role of the House to the public.

Presidential past

In 1890, when responsible government was established in WA, the President received an allowance for expenses, but on a lesser scale than a minister. Before 1890, the role of president was honorary.

Presidents of the Legislative Council in WA used to wear a traditional costume of a black gown and a ‘full bottomed wig’. There has been no resolution amongst Westminster parliaments about the wearing of traditional regalia. The Hon Clive Griffiths was the last president to wear a wig and gown in the Parliament of Western Australia. Griffiths is the longest serving president in a Westminster parliament. He served from 22 May 1977 to 21 May 1997.

When Griffiths nominated for presidency in 1977 he was opposed by Country Party MLC, Norman Baxter. It was the first time there had been a vote for the position of president. Griffiths won the ballot by a majority of votes. The traditional practice of selecting the president by party members was not going to be consistent.

On 22 May 2017, the first woman President of the Legislative Council was elected, the Hon Kate Doust MLC.

Presidents of the Legislative Council

No	Name	Election Date	Period as President	Division	Party
1	Campbell, Thomas Cockburn	24 Dec 1890	29 Dec 1890 - 27 Sept 1892	Nominated	None
2	Shenton, George	24 Dec 1890	11 Oct 1892 - 21 May 1906	Metropolitan	None
3	Briggs, Henry	30 June 1896	21 June 1906 - 9 June 1919	West	Lib
4	Kingsmill, Walter	9 Feb 1903	31 July 1919 - 21 May 1922	Metropolitan-Suburban	Lib Nat 1917-
5	Wittenoom, Edward Horne	16 July 1894	27 July 1922 - 9 Aug 1926	Central	Lib; Nat
6	Kirwan, John Waters	22 May 1908	10 Aug 1926 - 21 May 1946	South	Ind
7	Cornell, James	22 May 1912	25 July 1946 - 25 Nov 1946	South	ALP Nat 1916-
8	Seddon, Harold	22 May 1922	26 Nov 1946 - 21 May 1954	North-East	Nat Lib 1945
9	Loton, Anthony Lloyd	18 Nov 1944	14 June 1954 - 6 Aug 1958	South-East	CP
10	Latham, Charles George	14 Dec 1946	7 Aug 1958 - 21 May 1960	East	CP
11	Diver, Leslie Charles	3 May 1952	28 July 1960 - 21 May 1974	Central	CP
12	Griffith, Arthur Frederick	20 June 1953	22 May 1974 - 21 May 1977	Suburban	Lib
13	Griffiths, Clive Edward	22 May 1965	24 May 1977 - 21 May 1997	South-East Metropolitan	Lib
14	Cash, Samuel George Ernest	22 May 1989	27 May 1997 - 21 May 2001	North Metropolitan	Lib
15	Cowdell, John Alexander	22 May 1993	24 May 2001 - 21 May 2005	South-West	ALP
16	Griffiths, Nicholas David	22 May 1993	24 May 2005 - 21 May 2009	East Metropolitan	ALP
17	House, Barry John	24 Oct 1987	22 May 2009 - 21 May 2017	South-West	Lib
18	Doust, Kate Esther	22 May 2001	22 May 2017 - 21 May 2021	South Metropolitan	ALP
19	Clohesy, Alanna	21 May 2013	25 May 2021 -	East Metropolitan	ALP

Abbreviations

ALP	Australian Labor Party
CP	Country Party
Ind	Independent
Lib	Liberal

Sources

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