

Premier of Western Australia

The Premier of Western Australia is the head of the executive government. Following a general election, the Premier, who is the leader of the party or coalition of parties holding a majority in the Legislative Assembly, is by convention commissioned by the Governor to form government.

History

When Western Australia first commenced responsible government in 1890, the word 'Premier' was merely a courtesy title and the position was not recognised constitutionally. In fact, the office was not formally listed as one of the executive positions until the appointment of Ross McLarty in 1947. Today, Sir John Forrest is officially regarded as being the first Premier of Western Australia when he took office in 1890. Dr Carmen Lawrence, on 12 February 1990, became the first woman to hold this office in Australia.

Role

Although the Premier does have ministerial responsibilities, one of the most important tasks is to oversee and coordinate the work of other ministers. In Labor governments, the Premier is the leader of the parliamentary party and is chosen by the caucus¹. The Premier allocates portfolios to those members who are elected to the ministry by the caucus. In Liberal and National Party coalition or alliance governments, the Premier is usually chosen by the parliamentary members of the dominant party in the coalition (Liberal Party). The Premier selects the ministry and allocates the portfolios. An agreement between the Liberal and National Parties indicate how many ministerial posts are held by the respective parties.

The Premier leads the government and takes a major part in parliamentary debates and speaking to the media about government policy. The roles of the Premier include:

- leading the government in the state;
- chairing cabinet meetings;
- providing advice to Her Majesty the Queen on the exercise of powers and functions of the Governor;
- choosing ministers and allocating portfolios (Liberal and National) or allocating portfolios to ministers chosen by caucus (Labor);
- setting out the principal ministerial responsibilities of ministers and the acts they will administer (through Executive Council (EXCO));
- authorising a minister to perform the duties and functions of another minister (through EXCO);
- advising the Governor as to the opening day of a session and the proroguing of Parliament prior to a general election;
- ensuring adherence to caretaker government conventions and practices following a general election announcement;
- being the prime communicator between the Governor and cabinet, the Western Australian government and federal, state and territory governments, and between the Western Australian government and overseas governments; and
- as a member of Parliament, representing his/her electorate.

Sir John Forrest



¹ A meeting of all the elected ALP members from both houses.



