



Department of Culture and the Arts  
Government of Western Australia

State Records Office of Western Australia

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# A Guide to the 1977 State Cabinet Records

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WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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# Contents

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Introduction	page 3
Events and Issues That Made News in 1977	page 4
The 1977 State Cabinet Members	page 6
The 1977 State Cabinet Records: An Overview	page 8
The 1977 State Cabinet Records: A Description	page 9

## Introduction

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State Cabinet records are historically significant papers that record the decisions made by the government of the day. These unique records are the primary source documents for information about the issues raised at Cabinet meetings.

State Cabinet records are subject to a 30-year embargo from public access. Each year, a new set of Cabinet papers – from 30 years previous – is released from this embargo and may be accessed by the Western Australian community.

The 1977 State Cabinet records are held by the State Records Office of WA, the authority with responsibility for managing, preserving and providing the community with access to the State's archives.

Members of the public may now access the 1977 State Cabinet records at the State Records Office.

The complete set of 1977 State Cabinet records that have been released comprise:

- **Cabinet Minutes and Decisions**
- **Cabinet Index**

Access to these records can be made at the State Records Office Search Room. The State Records Office is situated on the Ground Floor of the Alexander Library Building, James Street Mall, Perth Cultural Centre. The State Records Office Search Room is open Monday – Friday, 9.30am – 4.30pm. For further details about accessing the records, please contact the State Records Office on ph. 9427 3360.

## Events and Issues that Made News in 1977

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*The following historical summary has been prepared by the State Records Office of Western Australia with research assistance provided by University of Western Australia history student Ainsley Free.*

Internationally, 1977 was the year Jubilee celebrations were held to commemorate twenty-five years of Queen Elizabeth's II's reign. Benazir Bhutto's father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was overthrown as the first elected Prime Minister of Pakistan by a military coup. The television series *Roots* began its hugely successful run and *Star Wars* opened in cinemas becoming the then highest grossing film of all time. Abba were at the top of the pop charts and the "King of Rock and Roll", Elvis Presley died at the age of 42. The first Apple II computers went on sale and the United States of America launched its Voyager 1 and 2 scientific probes into space.

In Australia, 83 people died in the nation's worst railway disaster at Granville near Sydney. England beat Australia 3-0 at cricket in the Ashes tour and a controversial new form of the game, World Series Cricket, was initiated. In entertainment, the popular television soap *Number 96* was cancelled. In politics, a new party known as the Australian Democrats was launched by former Liberal MP Don Chipp.

Thirty years ago, the cost of milk was 23 cents/bottle. A driver's license cost \$5. However, the cost of a return economy flight to England was \$1736 – over \$6000 in today's money.<sup>1</sup>

In Federal government, the incumbent Liberal Party led by Malcolm Fraser with coalition partner the National Country Party led by Doug Anthony was returned to office.

At the State level, the Liberal-Country Party coalition government led by the then 65 year old Sir Charles Court entered its 4<sup>th</sup> year in office. A State election was held in February in 1977 and the Coalition Government led by Sir Charles Court was returned to office with an eleven seat majority in the Legislative Assembly. The Court Government was to secure a third victory in the State elections in 1980.

Notable issues raised in the Western Australian State Cabinet of 1977 are identified in the following pages.

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<sup>1</sup> 1977 costs sourced from 1977 State Cabinet Minutes and Decisions.

## State Rights

The era of the Court Government has been characterised by the anti-centralist views of its leader Sir Charles Court and how these views informed State government policy and decision-making. The year of 1977 was little different in this respect. A number of matters referred to Cabinet during the year highlight the political tensions between the State and Commonwealth governments of that time.

Most notably, the State government directly opposed the Commonwealth government on the matter of access to Aboriginal reserves in the Kimberly for the purposes of mining exploration. The Commonwealth's position was that such access required consent by Aboriginal parties even if this may impede mining exploration. To circumvent Commonwealth policy, Cabinet agreed to amend Regulation 8 of the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act* so as to give the State ultimate authority in regards to the issuing of entry permits to Aboriginal reserves.<sup>2</sup> Implementation of this policy would later erupt in controversial circumstances in Noonkanbah in 1980.

The Court Government was strongly opposed to a Human Rights Bill proposed by the Commonwealth, citing its likely impingement on State rights. Cabinet agreed that the Prime Minister be advised that "the WA Government will not participate and be a party to the Bill".<sup>3</sup>

Cabinet expressed concern about the Commonwealth's National Housing Cost Inquiry and the implications this may have on land development in WA.<sup>4</sup>

Cabinet resisted a Commonwealth proposal to take over Companies and Securities industry legislation and sought for recommendations that would "protect our position and the separate State identity of State bodies, such as (the) Perth Stock Exchange."<sup>5</sup>

Conflict at the State and Federal levels also emerged over the North West Shelf Gas Project and what State Cabinet perceived as the Commonwealth overstepping its role in regards to industry liaison. In the Cabinet Minutes, the State Minister for Industrial Development notes that "it is disturbing that the draft guidelines (prepared by the Commonwealth and which relate to the environmental impact on the proposed North West Shelf gas Project) refer to policy questions such as 'gas export versus conservation for future Australian consumption' and 'some product consumption in the eastern Australian States...', matters which have already been the subject of negotiation and agreement between the State and the Commonwealth Governments and the Joint Venturers."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Minute of 07/11/1977

<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Minute of 17/05/1977

<sup>4</sup> Cabinet Minute of 08/08/1977

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet Minute of 25/01/1977

<sup>6</sup> Cabinet Minute of 20/12/1977

## **Mining**

In 1977, the Court Government submitted to Parliament a policy to allow the mining of uranium in Western Australia. This submission occurred in parallel with the Federal government's decision to allow the mining and export in Australia. To prepare for this activity, Cabinet agreed to the formation of a Uranium Sub-Committee to be chaired by the Premier and which would "be responsible for conducting or arranging any negotiations with the Commonwealth Government at Ministerial level where liaison, coordination and cooperation between the Commonwealth and State Government and industry are involved in respect of the Western Australian Government's uranium policy."<sup>7</sup> In Parliament, Sir Charles Court was to liken the uranium revolution to the railway revolution.<sup>8</sup>

On a related note, Cabinet agreed to allow the visit by a German nuclear powered merchant vessel into Western Australian ports "in the interests of getting people used to nuclear powered ships operating in and out of Western Australian ports".<sup>9</sup>

In 1977, the Wundowie Charcoal Iron Industry faced closure due primarily to a declining world demand in ferrous products. To prevent closure and the loss of 310 jobs, Cabinet agreed to provide financial assistance to the company and negotiations continued throughout the year to arrive at an agreement.<sup>10</sup> The company, which had commenced operations in the 1940's, finally ceased operations in 1981.

The Court Government also deliberated upon partial privatisation of the State's power supply. The State Energy Commission of Western Australia was unable to meet the cost of extensions to the Muja Power Station in Collie. To resolve this, a proposal was made for the funding, ownership and operation of Stage C of the Power Station to be contracted to private industry and that electricity would be sold back to the State Energy Commission. Cabinet agreed that the proposal be further explored with a view to proceeding "with firm negotiations if the Treasurer so decides."<sup>11</sup>

## **Water Conservation**

Low dam levels and concern about water use in the Perth metropolitan area led the Court Government to impose water restrictions when it took office.

In 1977, the Minister for Water advised Cabinet that water restrictions were having two unexpected side effects – the nursery industry reported a 35% downturn in business and the swimming pool industry stated they were selling

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<sup>7</sup> Cabinet Minute of 18/09/1977

<sup>8</sup> Hansard, 1977, p. 1241.

<sup>9</sup> Cabinet Minute of 22/02/1977

<sup>10</sup> Cabinet Minutes of 17/05/1977 and 3/10/1977

<sup>11</sup> Cabinet Minute of 29/08/1977

only 3% of the swimming pools they would sell in a normal year. The Minister for Water was keen to retain water restrictions but recommended to Cabinet that hand watering be permitted for certain periods and that this include topping up swimming pools.<sup>12</sup>

In May 2007, Cabinet approved the establishment of a Water Resources Council to advise the Minister on “the assessment, development, conservation, management and protection of water resources in Western Australia”.<sup>13</sup>

## **Aboriginal Affairs**

The State Attorney-General recommended to Cabinet that an investigation be made as to the implementation of ‘tribal law’ in the Pilbara and Kimberley region, in response to a review by the Commonwealth Law Reform Commission. It had been suggested by the Commission that it may be advantageous to introduce Aboriginal Customary Law in certain circumstances. The State Attorney-General was however concerned that the Commonwealth Law Reform Commission would “propound an unpractical or theoretical solution out of touch with the real conditions of the Kimberleys and Pilbara”. The Court Government, ever mindful of centralisation, commissioned a State investigation into the issues associated with implementing tribal law.<sup>14</sup>

Cabinet was informed of a Federal government proposal known as the ‘Illiterate Aboriginal Education Program’ which was aimed at “advising Aboriginals of the purpose and responsibilities of voting, the use and importance of electoral rolls, the correct use of ‘How-to-Vote Cards’ and the responsibilities associated with correctly filling in a ballot paper.” The Commonwealth funded program was met with support from Cabinet who agreed to cooperate with the Federal government for the program’s implementation in the Kimberley prior to Federal and State elections held at the end of 1977.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the other issues that were tabled in Cabinet during 1977 included:

## **Introduction of Lotto**

Approval was given for the introduction of Lotto in Western Australia (26/07/1977).

## **Royal Perth Hospital**

Approval was given for tenders to be called for completing structural work on the North Block of Royal Perth Hospital (estimated at \$4.93 million). The completion of this work was expected to relieve hospital overcrowding (7/11/1977).

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<sup>12</sup> Cabinet Minute of 05/09/1977

<sup>13</sup> Cabinet Minute of 03/05/1977

<sup>14</sup> Cabinet Minute of 05/07/1977

<sup>15</sup> Cabinet Minute of 14/11/1977

## **Royal Visit**

As part of Silver Jubilee celebrations, members of the Royal family including Queen Elizabeth II visited Perth in March 1977. To coincide with the Royal visit, Cabinet considered the matter of granting special remissions to persons serving prison sentences, as had occurred on some previous Royal visits, but decided to take no action (08/03/1977).

## **Retail Trading Hours**

Approval was given for liberalising trading hours for small shops. This proposal was met with some opposition from the Retail Trader's Association and a compromise was struck to limit late trading to each Thursday – what we now know as late night shopping (20/12/1977).

## **Development of Burswood Island**

Cabinet approved the plan for the development of the first stage of Burswood Island (14/11/1977).

## **Development of Joondalup**

Cabinet noted studies and activity to create a new urban residential centre in Joondalup (08/03/1977)

## **Public Works**

Cabinet rejected a proposal to construct a new government building adjacent to Parliament House to accommodate the Education Department and 1750 employees (20/12/1977).

## **New Hockey Stadium**

Cabinet considered the construction of an international hockey stadium on the old Hale School ground adjacent to Kings Park and requested that a detailed submission be prepared (7/11/1977).

## **Local Film Industry**

Following the renaissance of the national film industry during the mid-1970's, approval was given to provide financial assistance to the local film industry, subject to a detailed submission (23/05/1977).

## **Western Australia – “A State of Excitement”**

Approval was given for new Western Australian vehicle license plates to incorporate the recently coined slogan “A State of Excitement”. This proposal was met with objection from the Royal Automotive Club on the grounds that this could be regarded as advertising, but Cabinet confirmed its decision to proceed (26/04/1977).

## **Solar Energy Research**

Cabinet approved the printing of a Bill for a *Solar Energy Research Act*. This Act would establish the Solar Energy Research Institute of Western Australia to coordinate, undertake, finance and promote solar energy research in Western Australia (10/05/1977).

### **Local Government Misadministration**

Cabinet approved the release of a report into misadministration at the City of Stirling (07/11/1977).

### **Computer Experiment in Schools**

A proposed "Computer Experiment in Schools" to subsidise the cost of computers in schools, in anticipation of their greater use, was considered before Cabinet before being referred back to the Minister to discuss with Treasury (31/05/1977).

### **Reduction of Vehicles in Perth Central Business District**

Cabinet released for public discussion a preliminary study to reduce vehicle traffic in the Perth CBD. In 1977, 44% of commuters to Perth used public transport (03/05/1977).

### **Controversy Over School Literature**

Controversy erupted in the Perth media about the suitability of the book "A Salute to the Great McCarthy" in the school syllabus. The Minister for Education reported that a number of community associations had complained about the book's inclusion in schools which they deemed offensive. Cabinet decided the inclusion of the book was "unfortunate ... and requested the Joint Syllabus Committee to have regard for the importance of selecting edifying literature." (25/01/1977)

# The 1977 State Cabinet Members

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## **Court Ministry**

The Hon. Sir Charles Walter Michael COURT, O.B.E., M.L.A.  
*Premier; Treasurer; Minister Co-ordinating Economic and Regional Development*

The Hon. Desmond Henry O'NEIL, M.L.A.  
*Deputy Premier; Chief Secretary; Minister for Police and Traffic; Regional Administration and the North-West*

The Hon. Richard Charles OLD, M.L.A.  
*Minister for Agriculture*

The Hon. Graham Charles MacKINNON, M.L.C.  
*Minister for Fisheries and Wildlife; Tourism; Conservation and the Environment; Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council*

The Hon. Raymond James O'CONNOR, M.L.A.  
*Minister for Works; Water Supplies; Housing*

The Hon. William Leonard GRAYDEN, M.L.A.  
*Minister for Labour and Industry; Consumer Affairs; Immigration*

The Hon. Ian George MEDCALF, E.D., Q.C., M.L.A.  
*Attorney-General; Minister for Federal Affairs*

The Hon. Peter Vernon JONES, M.L.A.  
*Minister for Education; Cultural Affairs; Recreation*

The Hon. Andrew MENSAROS, M.L.A.  
*Minister for Industrial Development; Mines; Fuel and Energy*

The Hon. Edgar Cyril RUSHTON, M.L.A.  
*Minister for Local Government; Urban Development and Town Planning*

The Hon. Keith Alan RIDGE, M.L.A.  
*Minister for Health; Community Welfare*

The Hon. David John WORDSWORTH, M.L.C.  
*Minister for Transport*

The Hon. Margaret June CRAIG, M.L.A.  
*Minister for Lands and Forests*

# The 1977 State Cabinet Records

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## **An Overview**

Unlike the release of Cabinet papers at the Commonwealth level, where more sensitive documents remain embargoed beyond the 30-year period, all of the 1977 State Cabinet records for Western Australia are being released for public access.

The nature of recording Cabinet decisions has changed over the preceding decades. In more recent times, the documentation associated with a Cabinet decision can be extensive. In 1977, Cabinet recordkeeping was more succinct and the main set of records comprises the Cabinet Minutes and Decisions.

Although there is a set of Cabinet Agendas and Cabinet Indexes that are included in the records being released, topics of Cabinet submissions are simply listed chronologically.

To assist in locating information within the Cabinet Minutes, a chronological listing of the issues heard at Cabinet meetings is included in this guide.

# The 1977 State Cabinet Records

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## A Description

### Cabinet Minutes and Decisions

- Cabinet Minutes are the original primary source that document decisions made at Cabinet meetings.
- Cabinet Minutes comprise the names of Ministers for each meeting, copies of cabinet submissions, a record of Cabinet decisions and supporting reports/summaries for submissions (if applicable).

Location: *State Records Office of Western Australia*

Reference: *Consignment 1819, files `1976/57 v7 – 1977/243 v3*

Quantity: *9 files, 0.64 linear metres*

<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v7</i>	<i>08/11/1976 – 18/01/1977</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v8</i>	<i>25/01/1977 – 22/02/1977</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1977/34 v1</i>	<i>08/03/1977 – 03/05/1977</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1977/34 v2</i>	<i>10/05/1977 – 14/06/1977</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1977/34 v3</i>	<i>21/06/1977 – 19/07/1977</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1977/34 v4</i>	<i>26/07/1977 – 05/09/1977</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1977/248 v1</i>	<i>12/09/1977 – 17/10/1977</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1977/248 v2</i>	<i>24/10/1977 – 07/11/1977</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1977/248 v3</i>	<i>14/11/1977 – 04/01/1978</i>

### Cabinet Index

- Chronological index recording the topic of each submission raised at cabinet meetings.

Location: *State Records Office of Western Australia*

Reference: *Consignment 2844, items 3 and 4*

Quantity: *2 files, 0.02 linear metres*

<i>Cabinet Index</i>	<i>2844/3+4</i>	<i>09/04/1974 – 20/12/1977</i>
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