



Department of Culture and the Arts
Government of Western Australia

State Records Office of Western Australia

State Records Office of WA

A Guide to the Cabinet papers of 1976

INTRODUCTION

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 1976 State Cabinet records are held by the *State Records Office of WA*, the authority with responsibility for managing, preserving and providing access to the State Archives collection.

Members of the public may now access the 1976 State Cabinet records at the *State Records Office*.

The complete set of 1976 State Cabinet records being released comprise:

- **Cabinet Minutes and Decisions**
- **Cabinet Agendas**
- **Cabinet Accounts**
- **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 or sro@sro.wa.gov.au .

EVENTS AND ISSUES THAT MADE NEWS IN 1976¹

In 1976, the aftermath of Whitlam's dismissal as Prime Minister began to be felt. At the Federal level, the Liberal Party and National Country Party coalition won the double dissolution election outright with Malcolm Fraser at the helm on the 13 December, 1975. This was to usher in a style of government which differed greatly from that of centralist Whitlam.

State governments across the nation had to adjust to this new style promptly, and some welcomed it more than others. Western Australia's Liberal and National Country Party coalition was one of those who welcomed the change. Premier Sir Charles Court's secessionist ideals were somewhat at odds with, and therefore frustrated by, Whitlam's style of government, especially in the area he was most passionate about; industrial development. In fact there was no secret to Premier Court's vigorous opposition to the centralist trends in Whitlam's Commonwealth government policy making. Therefore the Fraser government's encouragement of State and Territory autonomy happily coincided with Court's own disposition towards States' rights.

1976 saw the retirement of John Tonkin from leadership of the Western Australian Labor Party. Tonkin decided to serve out the rest of his time in Parliament on the back bench and fully retired from government service early the next year. He was succeeded as opposition leader by Colin Jamieson. Writers have commented that Tonkin's trademark as Premier of gentlemanly conduct gradually disappeared in Parliament and was replaced by a more combative tone. Tonkin was bid a fond farewell.

Noteworthy Legislation approved in 1976:

- Amendments to the *Adoption of Children Act* in which the word "illegitimate" was removed and a penalty of \$400 or six months imprisonment was put in place for the illegal adoption of children.
- Amendments to the *Electoral Act* that put in place more controls on voting procedure in order to prevent abuses of the electoral process. This affected the supervision of postal voting and votes by illiterate Australians.
- *Industrial Arbitration Acts*
- *Industrial Lands (CSBP & Farmers Ltd.) Agreement Act*

¹ This section and the Index were written by Michele Tan as part of a UWA arts practicum, 2007

- The new *Rural Housing (Assistance) Act* established the *Rural Housing Authority* to act as liaison between farmers and financial institutions in the provision of suitable housing on rural properties. This served to promote the development of rural communities.
- The *National Parks Authority Act* established the *National Parks Authority of Western Australia* and provided for the vesting and management of certain areas as National Parks or reserves. This served to preserve the natural environment, enhance appreciation for it, and develop tourism opportunities for the State.
- The *Royal Visit Holiday Act* made provision for a special holiday in honour of the visit Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh were to make in 1977.

A number of important issues were tabled in Cabinet that year.

- The development of the North West gas shelf was continually on the agenda throughout Court's era, as was the development of large-scale mining opportunities for the State.
- Irregularities during the 1974 State election resulted in concerns about the legitimacy of the ballots for illiterate voters. At a polling place in Derby there were claims that votes were being changed by persons nominated by illiterate Australians to mark their ballots for them. This led to important changes in the *Electoral Act* to counter such abuses which included a clause demanding that the person marking an illiterate Australian's ballot is a Presiding Officer at the polling place. Claims of electoral irregularities plagued the Court government and, in 1977, led to Keith Ridge's election being declared void under the *Electoral Act* by the Court of Disputed Returns.
- After Cyclone Tracy devastated the northern parts of the State in 1975, it was drought that was foremost on people's minds in 1976. The State government had several drought relief programs aimed at helping the farmers in the all important primary resources industries. The drought had many repercussions, affecting government revenue as well as the industries that serviced farming. In fact, people all over Western Australia were concerned about the drought including a Nedlands resident who initiated a plan to send suburban grass clippings to starving livestock.

- A skills shortage had many people worried. The government introduced a plan to make it easier for employers to hire and train school leavers by allowing for trainees to be apprenticed to a board of employers rather than individual employers. This created a pool of apprentices with whom employers were already familiar, and made training cheaper by spreading the cost over several organizations. It also benefited the employees because it gave them a wider skill set and therefore made them more employable.
- What became regarded as the Tresillian Affair involved a proposal to relocate the mentally disabled children of the Tresillian Hospital in Nedlands (which is situated in the central metropolitan area and was Sir Charles Court's own electorate) to a refurbished hospital in Forrestfield (which is, by comparison, 30km from city). The move was postponed because of widespread criticism and party dissension. The Tresillian hospital was still ultimately sold to the Nedlands City Council for use as a community centre. The children were eventually moved to Forrestfield.
- The findings of the *Laverton Royal Commission* were released in April 1976. The attitude of police officers and their dealings with Indigenous people was an issue that was highlighted in the Commission findings. In the report, the Commission prioritized social welfare issues specific to the Laverton area which it was felt contributed to the resultant incident, but the incident really spoke most urgently of a need to change police attitudes towards Indigenous people. To resolve this, an *Aboriginal Police Relations Committee* was established by the State Government to facilitate and encourage improved communication and to create a better understanding between Indigenous communities and police officers.
- In 1974 the State Government appointed a *Special Committee on the Proposal for a Western Australian Heritage Commission* in order to make recommendations as to how heritage was to be defined and managed in the State. The report of the Committee's findings was released in 1975. This coincided with the passing of the Australian Heritage Commission Act that the Commonwealth government legislated that year. In 1976 the *Western Australian Heritage Council Bill* was tabled in cabinet as a means to operate under the Australian Heritage Commission as well as to follow some of the recommendations made by the Special Committee.

- There was a proposal to develop Rottnest Island for tourism in a fashion sensitive to both its cultural and natural heritage values.
- Cabinet looked into making certain kinds of information pertaining to the plaintiff's sexual history inadmissible in rape prosecutions.
- When the Prime Minister requested opinions from the State governments regarding the National Anthem, the Court government advised the Prime Minister to make *God Save the Queen* the Australian National Anthem, and to relegate *Advance Australia Fair* to the Australian National Song.
- *Her Majesty's Theatre* was bought from a private businessman by the State Government on the behalf of the people of Western Australia. Eventually, the theatre was restored and improved to new splendor and opened its doors again in 1979 and was renamed *His Majesty's Theatre*.
- The State Government bought the *Channel 7 Edgley Entertainment Centre*, which was renamed the *Perth Entertainment Centre*, rescuing it from financial failure.
- Planning and work on a new Perth Cultural Centre just north of the Perth central train station continued, as was promised to the people in Court's 1974 election campaign. During Court's incumbency the current West Australian Art Gallery was built as part of the Cultural Centre and opened its doors in 1979. The overall plan included the renovation of the Museum building, the current State Library and the relocation of the Perth Technical College.
- Planning and organization for the Sesquicentennial Celebrations to be held in 1979 was underway. In 1976, a Special Advisory Panel was appointed to invite designs for an Official Emblem for the State's 150th Anniversary Celebrations.
- Cabinet agreed in principle to a proposal by Robert Holmes a Court to draft of a Bill to establish the Joondalup Development Corporation.
- The *Friends of East Timor* conducted an illegal rally in Forrest Place protesting at Indonesian aggression towards East Timor.

Royal Commissions were held or tabled on the following issues in 1976:

- *Royal Commission into the Trial of Baymís Ugle and Subsequent Investigations* (23/2/76)²
- *Laverton Royal Commission* (26/4/76)
- *Royal Commission on Prostitution* (28/6/76)³
- *State Government Insurance Office* (5/7/76)
- *Royal Commission into the Beef and Sheep Meats Industry* (8/11/76)

² Transcripts of proceedings are restricted for 75 years

³ Transcripts of proceedings are restricted for 75 years. No report was issued from this Royal Commission

THE 1976 STATE CABINET MEMBERS

Court Ministry

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

O'Neil, The Hon. Desmond Henry, M.L.A.
Minister for Works; Water Supplies; the North West

McNeill, The Hon. Neil, M.L.C.
Minister for Justice; Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council; Chief Secretary

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

O'Connor, The Hon. Raymond James, M.L.A.
Minister for Transport; Police; Traffic

MacKinnon, The Hon. Graham Charles, M.L.C.
Minister for Education; Cultural Affairs; Recreation

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

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

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

Ridge, The Hon. Keith Alan, M.L.A.
Minister for Lands; Forests; Tourism

Baxter, The Hon. Norman Eric, M.L.C.
Minister for Health; Community Welfare

Jones, the Hon. Peter Vernon, M.L.A.
Minister for Housing; Conservation and the Environment; Fisheries and Wildlife

Medcalf, the Hon. Ian George, M.L.C.
Minister for Federal Affairs; Attorney General

THE 1976 STATE CABINET RECORDS

AN OVERVIEW

Unlike the release of 1976 Cabinet papers at the Commonwealth level, where more sensitive documents remain embargoed beyond the 30-year period, all of the 1976 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 and voluminous. In 1976, Cabinet recordkeeping was more succinct and the main set of records comprised the Cabinet Minutes and Decisions. During Cabinet meetings, the Premier himself would record a note of the decision and any conditions that may apply to that decision.

A set of Cabinet Agendas and Cabinet Indexes are included in the records being released, however, 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 as an appendix to this guide.

THE 1976 STATE CABINET RECORDS

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: *Series 1228, Consignment 1819, files 1975/443 – 1976/57 v7*

Quantity: *8 files*

<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1975/443</i>	<i>22/12/1975 – 02/02/1976</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v1</i>	<i>09/02/1976 – 25/03/1976</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v2</i>	<i>29/03/1976 – 03/05/1976</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v3</i>	<i>10/05/1976 – 08/06/1976</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v4</i>	<i>16/06/1976 – 09/08/1976</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v5</i>	<i>11/08/1976 – 20/09/1976</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v6</i>	<i>26/09/1976 – 01/11/1976</i>
<i>Cabinet Minutes and Decisions</i>	<i>File 1976/57 v7</i>	<i>09/11/1976 – 18/01/1977</i>

Cabinet Agendas

- Cabinet Agendas are files containing lists of submissions to be discussed at Cabinet meetings.

Location: *State Records Office of Western Australia*

Reference: *Series 2802, Consignment 2839, files 1974/0131 v1 & 1974/0131 v2*

Quantity: *2 files*

<i>Cabinet Agendas</i>	<i>File 1974/0131 v1</i>	<i>11/04/1974 – 14/04/1976</i>
<i>Cabinet Agendas</i>	<i>File 1974/0131 v2</i>	<i>01/01/1974 – 31/12/1976</i>

Draft Agendas

Location: *State Records Office of Western Australia*

Reference: *Series 2802, Consignment 2839, files 1975/0248 v1 & 1975/0248 v2*

Quantity: *2 files*

<i>Draft Agendas</i>	<i>Cabinet</i>	<i>File 1975/0248 v1</i>	<i>04/06/75-12/07/1976</i>
<i>Draft Agendas</i>	<i>Cabinet</i>	<i>File 1975/0248 v2</i>	<i>19/07/76-26/04/77</i>

Cabinet Accounts

- Cabinet balance sheets, account statements and financial correspondence

Location: *State Records Office of Western Australia*

Reference: *Series 3178, Consignment 2839*

Quantity: *1 file*

<i>Cabinet Accounts</i>	<i>1976/0270 v2</i>	<i>01/01/74 – 31/12/76</i>
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Cabinet Index

Location: *State Records Office of Western Australia*

Reference: *Consignment 2844/3*

Quantity: *1 file*

<i>Cabinet Index</i>	<i>1975/248 v 1</i>	<i>09/04/74-22/02/77</i>
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