




Speech By
Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 17 August 2016

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Hewitt, Mr NTE

 **Mr SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (2.18 pm): Today I rise to speak on behalf of the people of my electorate and the people of Central Queensland more broadly in paying tribute to Neville Hewitt, a man who served his community and the state of Queensland for 24 years as a member of this Legislative Assembly, representing the electorate of Mackenzie and later the electorate of Auburn. Much of the area that Neville Hewitt represented is now encompassed within the boundaries of the electorate of Callide.

To put Neville Hewitt's service in this place into some perspective, I think it is appropriate that I note that Neville Hewitt was the first member of parliament whom I ever met. He presented me with a trophy at my primary school sports day in Monto in the mid-1960s. I still have the trophy. Even at that stage, he had been in this parliament for 10 years. Even at the stage where he was presenting me, as a primary school student, with a sports trophy, he had been in this parliament for 10 years. He was a legend. He was certainly a legend to us kids because he gave us a holiday when he came to the school. If only MPs today had the same authority. He certainly was a legend in Central Queensland.

As has been indicated, Neville Hewitt was born on a Theodore cattle property in 1920. He was the eldest of six children. He was educated at Theodore State School and the Rockhampton Grammar School as well as through distance education.

Like so many of his generation, he was thrown into the war and enlisted in the RAAF in Brisbane on 12 October 1941—one week before his 21st birthday. His distinguished war service has already been outlined yet it says much about the man that he tended to downplay this record and would not speak to many people at all, even his own family, about those war years. He was more comfortable talking about rural pursuits, or talking about the weather, the cattle and the crops, or following the races and talking about his own exploits.

At the end of war Neville returned to Central Queensland and resumed his involvement in rural industries. In 1956 he won the seat of Mackenzie, as has been outlined, in an election which saw the return of the Gair government. Neville Hewitt had a fairly simple philosophy when he was elected and he outlined that in his maiden speech to the Assembly on 28 August 1956 when he said—

It is up to me now to do my utmost at all times and to speak and act as my conscience dictates in the interests of the electorate and the people of Queensland generally.

In his maiden speech Neville Hewitt sought to draw attention to what he regarded as the difficulties facing his rural constituents and the way in which government could assist them to reach their potential. He spoke at length of the need for flood mitigation to assist farmers and graziers, the need for the construction of roads and bridges to bring rural communities closer together, the need to

encourage doctors to come to rural communities, the problems of land tenure and the need for additional railway rolling stock to service the developing coalmines of Central Queensland. They are all subjects that are eerily familiar to those of us in this parliament today.

That maiden speech represented much of what Neville Hewitt saw as his mission in life. As a representative of the people of the Central Queensland region he regarded his role as one of giving a voice to their concerns so that those who lived away from the major population centres would receive as much attention from government as those who lived in urban areas. Through all his years in this parliament Neville Hewitt actually lived in Rockhampton, the unofficial capital of Central Queensland. He became known I think as the member for Central Queensland as much as the member for Mackenzie and Auburn.

Neville Hewitt was the member for Mackenzie when two major mining developments, Moura and Blackwater, commenced. It was through his efforts that much of the important social infrastructure was built to service those growing communities. Neville Hewitt's advocacy for the development of the brigalow lands scheme is well known. This scheme was instrumental in opening up much of Central Queensland to beef and grain industries. That productive province of Queensland now is an important part of the legacy of Neville Hewitt and his colleagues in this parliament through those years.

While Neville Hewitt was unstinting in his service to the people of Mackenzie and then the people of Auburn it was as a minister that he made the most significant contribution to the people of rural and regional Queensland. In 1969 he was appointed the minister for water resources. Nearly all of Queensland's major dams and weirs were constructed during his time as minister. He knew and understood that water was crucial to the development of the state's primary industries and that government had a responsibility to provide that crucial infrastructure.

Indeed, in his final speech to parliament just before his retirement in 1980 Neville Hewitt paid tribute to the public servants of the Water Resources Commission with whom he had worked over so many years. His retirement from this House was not the end of Neville Hewitt's community involvement or his contribution to Central Queensland.

As a young man he had been a successful amateur jockey. It is reported that he rode over 300 winners, and at least a couple of those while he was a member of parliament. He was a member of the Rockhampton Jockey Club and served as chairman for six years after his retirement from politics. At the same time he remained active in many organisations in Central Queensland, continuing to contribute to his community. His extended family continues to do that today.

Perhaps the last word should go to the *Morning Bulletin*, which wrote on 31 May 1963, one day before the state election, of Neville Hewitt that—

He is best known for his warm-hearted approach to the problems of the individual. He is indeed a reliable friend.

He has been a reliable friend for Central Queensland. I join with other honourable members in paying my respects to the late Neville Hewitt and extend my condolences to his family.