

# 1992 Cabinet Minutes: Background Report

## Report

1992 was an election year in Queensland, unfolding against a backdrop of significant national and international events.

At the start of February, US President George H.W. Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a Camp David agreement declaring a formal end to the Cold War. Days later, the Maastricht Treaty was signed in The Netherlands, founding the European Union. In early March, Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia; within weeks, war broke out between military forces of the new Bosnian republic and Yugoslav-backed Bosnian Serb forces.

In a March referendum, white South African citizens voted in favour of political reforms to end apartheid. At the start of June, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development ('the Earth Summit') began in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, addressing international responses to global warming among other issues. In early November, Democrat candidate Bill Clinton was elected US President, ending a twelve-year Republican hold on the White House.

In Australia, the year opened with President Bush addressing a joint meeting of federal parliament, the first US head of state to do so. Next month, heads were turned and tabloid headlines went into overdrive when Prime Minister Paul Keating broke with royal visit protocol and placed his hand on the back of Queen Elizabeth II. In popular culture, Australian films 'Strictly Ballroom' and 'Romper Stomper' were released in cinemas, while 'Bananas in Pyjamas' debuted midyear on ABC TV.

In February, one-cent and two-cent coins were withdrawn from circulation. The same month, former PM Bob Hawke resigned from parliament, forcing a by-election in his seat of Wills (won in April by Independent Phil Cleary, only to be later ruled ineligible under Section 44 of the Constitution). PM Keating visited Kokoda in Papua New Guinea for Anzac Day ceremonies; he kissed the ground at a memorial, exalting the battle site to the same hallowed status as Gallipoli. In early June, the High Court delivered its landmark 'Mabo No. 2' decision, thereby overturning the doctrine of *terra nullius*.

In the middle months of the year, the Australian Greens party was formed in Sydney by its state party branches; Janet Powell resigned as Australian Democrats leader, while Nick Greiner and John Bannon resigned amid controversy as Premiers of, respectively, New South Wales and South Australia. After its formation midyear in Canberra, the first Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting convened in Perth in December. Days later, Keating delivered a notable speech in Redfern Park in Sydney, acknowledging the dispossession of the country's First Nations peoples.

In Queensland, perennial climatic extremes were felt in various parts of the state. Weipa in the state's far north was lashed by wild weather at both ends of this year, with Tropical Cyclone Mark in January then Severe Tropical Cyclone Nina in December causing damage to the town and surrounds ('Cyclone Nina eases up after hitting Aurukun', *Courier-Mail*, 26 December 1992). Heavy February rains brought flooding north of Brisbane; a state of emergency was declared in Noosa Shire, Gympie, and Maryborough ('Gympie braces for disaster: Flood chaos hits state', *Courier-Mail*, 22 February 1992). In March, Tropical Cyclone Fran made landfall near Town of Seventeen Seventy, causing minor damage and flooding in the Bundaberg district ('State of disaster: Brisbane, Gympie warned', *Courier-Mail*, 17 March 1992). In late November, destructive storms hit Brisbane and surrounding areas of the south-east, with extensive hail damage and even tornadoes reported ('All hail to a cool change after hit-run storms', *Courier-Mail*, 30 November 1992). Early in the year, Cabinet approved amendments to the structure and operations of the State Counter-Disaster Organisation to better manage counter-disaster responses and activities in Queensland (Decision 1943).

Early this year, the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) confirmed it could not definitively say which of the dozens of Members of Parliament implicated in the so-called 'travel rorts' scandal had actually misused their travel allowances ('Why CJC won't name MPs', *Courier-Mail*, 22 January 1992). The CJC investigation had already prompted the Opposition leader along with two government ministers to resign

their positions in the previous December; no further resignations (or criminal charges) ensued after the CJC's report was tabled in parliament in early February, although a handful of MPs repaid some expenses voluntarily ('MP probe over: Bingham', *Courier-Mail*, 8 February 1992).

In a related matter, the CJC investigated claims by previous Police Minister, Terry Mackenroth, that the Police Commissioner, Noel Newnham, had been 'neglectful' in monitoring and reporting his own travel expenses. Newnham stood aside from his position during the investigation; the CJC's report, tabled in March, found that the Commissioner had not given due oversight to claiming allowances for travel ('Chief is ready for CJC report', *Courier-Mail*, 7 March 1992; 'Newnham's anger: Police chief found guilty over airfare', *Courier-Mail*, 28 April 1992). The matter was moved to the Misconduct Tribunal and was then the subject of a Supreme Court appeal before, ultimately, a charge of official misconduct was dismissed and the Police Commissioner was reinstated midyear.

In February, the promised referendum on the future of daylight saving in Queensland was held, after the government had backed away in the previous year from its move to introduce the measure 'permanently'. While the major party leaders all expressed support for the continuation of daylight saving, a majority of Queenslanders disagreed – the proposal was defeated 54.5 to 45.5 per cent, with the 'No' vote notably strongest in the regions outside of the south-east corner ('Daylight axed: Referendum landslide settles the issue 'for all time'', *Sunday Mail*, 23 February 1992). Premier Wayne Goss commented afterwards that "most pundits over-estimated the level of support for daylight saving", including among voters in the state's south-east (Ministerial statement, 12 March 1992). Queensland's last day of extended daylight hours was observed on Saturday 29 February (see Decisions 2091, 2092).

With a state election due this year, the Goss government finalised some outstanding items on its legislative agenda. Prominent among these, the long-promised Heritage Act came into being in March, finally bringing Queensland into line with the rest of Australia's mainland states in having legislated protections (including a new Heritage Register) for recognised heritage sites (Decisions 1974, 2334). Also in that month, an Equal Opportunity in Public Employment Act was passed, to provide for equal employment opportunity in Queensland's public sector for certain 'target groups' (such as women, Indigenous people, and people from migrant backgrounds).

In the middle months of the year, the government boosted its environmental credentials with the passage of a Nature Conservation Act to allow for the declaration and management of protected natural areas (Decision 2056). The much-anticipated Peaceful Assembly Act came into being after a lengthy period of consultation and revision (Decision 2147); Attorney-General Dean Wells heralded it as introducing a 'new chapter' in the state's civil rights, although advocates complained that it still curtailed full freedom of the right to protest ('Wells plans to make street marches legal', *Courier-Mail*, 21 May 1992). Similarly, a Freedom of Information Act was passed that established a qualified right of public access to government documents (Decisions 2298, 2320, 2361, 2444, 2489, 2524). Enhanced protections for victims of family violence were instituted through the passing of the Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Amendment Act (Decisions 2039, 2206).

Some issues, however, would not yet be resolved or were dealt with in a manner that left certain groups unsatisfied. A notable example was the government's announcement in April that it would not change the state's prostitution laws to legalise sex work, counter to recommendations in a CJC report (based on earlier recommendations from the Fitzgerald Inquiry; 'Vice clampdown starts: New squad to target Mr Bigs', *Courier-Mail*, 27 April 1992). Rather, Cabinet endorsed 'strict enforcement' of existing policing approaches, while introducing amendments to prostitution laws late in the year partly to implement certain health-related measures in the sex work industry (Decisions 2059, 2068, 2430, 2431, 2438, 2439, 2498; 'Police to act on sex clients', *Courier-Mail*, 26 October 1992; 'Police may bug suspects: Brothels plan worse than Joh era – lawyer', *Courier-Mail*, 27 October 1992). As observers then put it, "on the issue of the decriminalisation and legalisation of prostitution, which the CJC recommended and which polling had indicated 60 per cent of the population supported, [Goss] erred on the side of caution" (Stevens and Wanna, p. 25).

As recession conditions continued to impact the economy, with high national unemployment levels adding to government woes, attempts were made to boost economic activity (and to boost the government's economic management credentials, especially in this election year). The states – and Queensland in particular – at times called on the federal government to invest in major capital works programs. Additionally, the state government turned to traditional sector 'workhorses' to lift job prospects in hard hit areas. Coal exploration and mining projects, or expansion of existing projects,

were invited in places like central Queensland's Bowen Basin (Decisions 1947, 2086; 'Rail freight relief boost to coal mines', *Courier-Mail*, 28 April 1992).

Reinforcing this approach, in late April the Premier released his government's 'blueprint' for the state's economic future. The 'Queensland – Leading State' document recognised that diversification of the state's economy was an important goal, yet the platform consolidated government support for traditional economic sectors, such as tourism and the coal mining industry (Decision 2070; 'Leading State demonstrates possibilities in tough times', *Courier-Mail*, 28 April 1992). Of particular note, the platform advocated a general approach of 'market enhancement', preferring a pro-business and minimal interventionist role for government.

In June, the South Bank Parklands in Brisbane were officially opened to much fanfare, with tens of thousands of visitors attending opening day festivities ('They love our beach: Sea and sand in city centre', *Sunday Mail*, 21 June 1992). The former World Expo '88 site had been kept from private sale and commercial development after concerted public lobbying led the previous government to establish the South Bank Corporation to manage and redevelop the site as public space (see Decision 2165). The next month, the Boggo Road Gaol No. 1 Division (men's prison) was officially closed with Corrective Services Minister Glen Milliner locking the main prison gates for the last time; the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre on the Boggo Road site continued operations for the time being (see Decisions 1940, 2592; 'No tears for Boggo Road', *Courier-Mail*, 28 July 1992).

Near the end of July, Sir Walter Campbell ended his seven-year stint as Queensland Governor and was succeeded by Leneen Forde, the first woman in this state (and second in Australia after Dame Roma Mitchell in South Australia) to hold the vice-regal post. Forde had been a practising solicitor and president of Zonta International prior to her noteworthy appointment, with the Premier noting in a public statement that "Mrs Forde has made an outstanding contribution to women's affairs at both the national and international level for many years" (Decision 2175; 'Family day for Mrs Governor', *Courier-Mail*, 30 July 1992).

With the Electoral Act assented to at the start of June, establishing the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) and confirming the state's recently redrawn electoral boundaries, all was in readiness to conduct this year's election in novel circumstances. The Electoral Commission noted as much in its post-election report: "[The 1992 state election] was a landmark event in Queensland's electoral history ... the first election conducted by the new independent electoral authority, the [ECQ]; the first conducted under new boundaries established by EARC in 1991; the first using the new Commonwealth-State joint roll; and the first poll in fifty years conducted under optional preferential voting." The Electoral Act had further provided for political party registration and the inclusion of party affiliations on ballot papers, 'mobile' polling in remote areas, a new system of declaration voting, along with other streamlined voting procedures (ECQ, p. iv).

For his part, the Premier appeared keen to bring on the electoral contest – after Treasurer Keith De Lacy handed down his state budget in late August, Wayne Goss on that same day called the election for Saturday 19 September; parliament was duly prorogued and, bewilderingly for some, there was no budget debate following ('Poll date anger: State Budget put to the vote'; 'Labor plumps for jobs and the three Goss pledges', *Courier-Mail*, 26 August 1992). The Premier's confidence, likely buoyed by his government's favourable standing in opinion polls – which from early in the year continually rated Goss extremely highly in terms of personal popularity – was, in the end, well founded ('Poll points to second Goss term', *Courier-Mail*, 15 February 1992; 'Federal focus on Goss gloss', *Courier-Mail*, 26 August 1992).

During a campaign fought mostly on traditional election issues, environmental matters interestingly loomed as a key concern for many voters, arguably more so than at previous state elections. The major parties responded by targeting the 'green vote' through decidedly environmentally conscious campaign announcements ('Leaders woo green votes', *Gold Coast Bulletin*, 14 September 1992). In any event, come polling day there seemed little mood for change in the electorate; the Goss Labor government was comfortably returned with no net loss of seats and only a marginal drop in the ALP's vote share ('Queensland gives Goss a vote of confidence', *Canberra Times*; 'It's Goss the boss again', *Sunday Mail*, 20 September 1992). As observed later, "against the divided Liberals ... and the dispirited Nationals, Goss ran a professional and well-measured campaign centred on his personal popularity," which proved a winning formula (Wanna, p. 373). The combination of election result and MP retirements (which included former Labor Opposition leader, Nev Warburton) provided an opportunity for Cabinet

renewal and a minor reshuffle; notably, Molly Robson was appointed new Minister for Environment and Heritage, doubling the number of women in the Goss Cabinet ('Goss Cabinet shake-up: Vaughan to throw open 3<sup>rd</sup> vacancy', *Courier-Mail*, 19 September 1992).

For their part, the major conservative parties more or less maintained their levels of voter support and effectively 'swapped' one seat between them (in the Liberals' favour). Still, they collectively won nineteen fewer seats than Labor had secured and remained ten seats short of being able to form a majority in unison. At the beginning of November, months of speculation were put to rest when the National and Liberal parties agreed to formally re-enter a coalition arrangement, with Liberal leader Joan Sheldon deputy to the Nationals' Rob Borbidge as Opposition leader ('A marriage made for the ballot box'; 'Cooper returns to former role on frontbench', *Courier-Mail*, 3 November 1992).

With the High Court having handed down its ground-breaking Mabo decision in June, Cabinet in early November heard an oral submission from the Premier about the ruling's implications for land use in Queensland. This came after the government had legislated a state-based land rights framework in the previous year through the Aboriginal Land Act and Torres Strait Islander Land Act. Cabinet noted the establishment of an interdepartmental working group chaired by the Cabinet Office to negotiate with the Commonwealth on 'Mabo-related' policy issues (Decision 2476).

Also in November, Jim O'Sullivan succeeded Noel Newnham as Queensland's Police Commissioner at the start of the month, after the government declined to reappoint Newnham to the role. O'Sullivan was a Deputy Commissioner beforehand and had the public backing of the new Police Minister, Paul Braddy; the same couldn't be said of Newnham after the CJC's earlier travel expenses investigation had soured relations between the government and the former Commissioner (Stevens and Wanna, p. 211). Later that month, Rob O'Regan QC was confirmed as new chair of the CJC, succeeding Sir Max Bingham; similarly, the new chairman enjoyed the endorsement of the Premier and the Attorney-General (both of whom had sought to expedite O'Regan's appointment prior to Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee approval processes), while Bingham on his departure levelled criticisms at the government of a lax approach to reform and 'unfettered' amassing of executive power ('O'Regan gets approval for top CJC post', *Courier-Mail*, 21 November 1992).

Following a prolonged period of public speculation about alleged jury tampering during the previous year's perjury trial of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the CJC in October confirmed its intention to undertake an inquiry into the trial's jury selection ('New probe into Joh jury: Bias claims worry CJC', *Courier-Mail*, 3 October 1992). The CJC's investigation commenced public hearings in mid-November – featuring evidence from an array of 'star' witnesses, including a former National Party minister and a party state director as well as jury foreman Luke Shaw and Sir Joh's defence lawyers – and carried its proceedings on into the next year ('Nationals 'given jury list', *Courier-Mail*, 19 November 1992).

## References

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