

Background report

1983 Cabinet Minutes

Dr Jonathan Richards for Queensland State Archives

In 1983, one yacht race and two elections (one federal and one state) took place, as well as several key decisions that would permanently change Australian society and business. Disastrous bushfires claimed 76 lives in Victoria and South Australia on 'Ash Wednesday', 16 February. Bob Hawke was elected as Prime Minister on 5 March 1983, defeating Malcolm Fraser's Liberal-Country Party coalition. The year was filled with much political intrigue and manoeuvring, both at the state level and in the Commonwealth sphere ('A year you wouldn't believe', *The Courier-Mail*, 28 December 1983, 21). Inflation, unemployment and wage demands continued to increase.

Reduced summer rainfall during 1982 and 1983 increased drought areas, especially in large parts of the state's north-west. South-east Queensland was the only region unaffected by drought. Rainfall during March 1983 in the state's west helped, but drought conditions continued in the central and southern districts. Widespread rainfall during April and May finally ended the drought, described as 'one of the worst on record in eastern Australia for the past 100 years' ('Rains best in 20 years', *The Courier-Mail*, 29 April 1983, 1; *Queensland Annual Yearbook*, 1984, 40).

The year began with drought declarations across more than 50 shires and towns in many parts of the state, followed by a cyclone in March and floods in April and May (Decs 39778 and 40678, Subs 35623 and 36462). Scrub-feeding subsidies for drought-affected graziers were approved in April (Dec. 39959, Sub. 35793). Members of Cabinet voted to amend the *Local Government Act*, permitting shire councils to purchase molasses and other feed for stock when it was plentiful and store it until needed during a drought (Decs 39964 and 40892; Subs 35798 and 36649).

Politically, Premier Bjelke-Petersen continued to assert his authority over the Cabinet, the National Party and the state ('Joh will still pick Cabinet', *The Courier-Mail*, 17 February 1983, 4). On 28 June 1983 the Wages Pause, ordered by the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in December 1982, ended. Unions and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) applied for a return to a centralised wage-fixing system, and wage increases equal to the rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The Confederation of Australian Industry supported a return to a centralised system, but opposed the wage increase on economic grounds. The Commonwealth, state and Northern Territory governments supported a return to a centralised wage-fixing system, but were divided on the issue of wage increases. The Commonwealth, Victorian, Western Australia and South Australia governments supported the claim, but the New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmanian and Northern Territory governments argued against it.

In April 1983 a National Economic Summit Conference was held in Canberra after the election of the Hawke Labor government. The Arbitration Commission announced the National Wage Case decision in September 1983, increasing wages and salaries by four per cent in line with CPI rises. On 21 October 1983, the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Commission of Queensland increased state awards and industrial agreements by four per cent and increased the guaranteed minimum wage to \$177.70 per week. From 10 October 1983 the Industrial Commission abolished the basic wage component in awards and replaced it by the guaranteed minimum wage.

1983 was marked by political upheaval in Queensland. Members of the Liberal Party resigned or were dismissed from Cabinet. On 5 August 1983 Terry White, the Minister for Welfare Services, and parliamentary leader of the Liberal Party from 2 August, was dismissed by Premier Bjelke-Petersen, causing a minor political crisis. Liberal ministers Sam Doumany (Minister for Justice and Attorney-General), Sir Llewellyn Edwards (Treasurer and Deputy Premier), William Hewitt (Minister for Environment, Survey, Valuation and Administrative Services), Sir William Knox (Employment and Labour Relations) and Don Lane (Minister for Transport) resigned on 18 August 1983. Premier Bjelke-Petersen then became the state's Treasurer ('Joh plans to take Treasury', *The Courier-Mail*, 11 August 1983, 1).

Conservative politicians attacked each other and the Coalition was apparently over but the Labor Party was unable to fully capitalise on their disunity ('How Cabinet will line up', *The Courier-Mail*, 4 November 1983, 2; 'A green land of agrarians, a back room in academia', *Sunday Mail*, 13 November 1983, 3). Lane left the Liberals and joined the National Party on 25 October to be re-appointed as Transport Minister. Brian Austin, elected on 22 October as a Liberal Party candidate, also joined the National Party on 25 October and resumed his office as Minister for Health ('The Party's Over', *The Courier-Mail*, 26 October 1983, 1).

An all-National Party Cabinet was sworn in after a state election that political historian D.B. Waterson described as a 'Liberal debacle' (*Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament 1981-1992*, 1993, 72). The Liberal Party vote, across Queensland, shrank from 26 per cent to 14 per cent. Sixteen Liberal Party seats, including 11 in Brisbane, were lost to the Labor and National parties, and only six Liberal members retained their seats. Despite this outcome, Sir Llew Edwards stated Bjelke-Petersen was a good leader: 'The Premier is not a dictator. In the 10 years in the Cabinet room his views have dominated only a dozen times' ('Libs risk extinction - Edwards', *The Courier-Mail*, 29 October 1983, 1).

Angelo Bertoni, the Minister for Health between 19 August 1983 and 22 October 1983, was defeated at the state election. The Minister for Northern Development and Aboriginal Affairs, Val Bird, retired at the same election. Anthony Elliott resigned, for 'family reasons', as Minister for Tourism, National Parks, Sport and the Arts on 6 November 1983 ('New faces, defectors in Cabinet', *The Courier-Mail*, 4 November 1983, 1).

The members of Cabinet (at 31 December 1983) were:

- Premier and Treasurer: Johannes Bjelke-Petersen
- Deputy Premier and Minister Assisting the Treasurer: William Gunn
- Minister for Local Government, Main Roads and Racing: Russell Hinze
- Minister for Works and Housing: Claude Wharton
- Minister for Mines and Energy: Ivan Gibbs
- Minister for Industry, Small Business and Technology: Michael Ahern
- Minister for Transport: Donald Lane
- Minister for Lands, Forestry and Police: William Glasson
- Minister for Health: Brian Austin
- Minister for Education: Lionel Powell
- Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services: John Goleby
- Minister for Primary Industries: Neil Turner
- Minister for Employment and Industrial Affairs: Vincent Lester
- Minister for Environment, Valuation and Administrative Services: Martin Tenni
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Neville Harper
- Minister for Welfare Services and Ethnic Affairs: Geoffrey Muntz
- Minister for Tourism, National Parks, Sport and The Arts: Peter McKechnie
- Minister for Northern Development and Aboriginal and Island Affairs: Robert Katter.

Capital works and major state development projects proceeded throughout the year. The Queensland Cultural Centre, on the south bank of the Brisbane River, was under construction. Stage One of the Centre, opened in 1982, housed the Queensland Art Gallery, while Stage Two,

due for completion in 1985, would provide space for the Performing Arts Complex. Work on Stage Three for the Queensland Museum was well advanced, and also due to finish in 1985. Construction of the Gateway Bridge, expected to be open to traffic in 1986, continued. Brisbane's new Container Terminal, reflecting the changes in global shipping, opened for business at Fisherman Islands.

Electrification of suburban railway lines continued, extending to Petrie and Thorneside during 1983. Work began on infrastructure for electric train passenger services to Caboolture and Beenleigh in the south. Surveys were undertaken for railway lines to Cleveland, and from Beenleigh to the Gold Coast. Land for a Redcliffe line was purchased.

Four major electricity generation projects were underway in Queensland. The Wivenhoe Pumped Storage Hydro Electric Project, due to be completed in 1984, would provide 500 Megawatts. The Tarong Power Station, generating 1400 Megawatts, was expected to be fully operational in 1986. Callide 'B' Power Station, which was expected to be completed by 1989, would make 700 Megawatts. The fourth power station, a 1400 Megawatt unit at Stanwell near Rockhampton, was predicted to be operational by 1989.

Work continued on the Wivenhoe Dam (on the Brisbane River) for water supply and flood mitigation purposes. Construction also continued on the Boondooma Dam (on the Boyne River), which would supply water for irrigation and the Tarong power station. Tenders for the building of the Burdekin Falls Dam, part of a major irrigation project, were approved in 1983.

A Coal Export Terminal at the mouth of the Brisbane River began operations in early 1983. Gladstone was displaced by Hay Point, south of Mackay, as Queensland's busiest port during 1982. Hay Point handled increasing amounts of coal, and became the leading Queensland port in terms of volume of cargo exported during 1982-83. Construction of a second coal export terminal, the Dalrymple Bay Terminal, progressed throughout the year, as did work on the Abbot Point Coal Facility, north of Bowen.

The Department of Mines estimated in June 1983 that total recoverable reserves of black coal in Queensland amounted to 5,560 million tonnes of coking coal and 8,250 million tonnes of non-coking coal (*Queensland Yearbook*, 1984, 309-10). The value of coal exports was \$1,563.7 million (\$324.5 million higher than in 1981-82), of which \$1,093.2 million, or 69.9 per cent, went to Japan.

Queensland's overseas exports to Japan in 1982-83 totalled \$1,762.7 million, just over one third of total exports. The United States and Canada took just over 10 per cent, and the European Economic Community, excluding the United Kingdom, took just under 10 per cent of Queensland's overseas exports (*Queensland Yearbook*, 1984, 338).

In September the yacht *Australia II* won the America's Cup, the first successful challenge in 132 years ('You beauty', *The Courier-Mail*, 28 September 1983, 1). The space shuttle *Challenger* was launched into orbit for the first time. Tensions in the Middle East continued, as sectarian warfare in Lebanon threatened to overflow into Israel and Syria. Civil war began in Sri Lanka and a Korean airliner was shot down by Russian fighter planes.

Micro-computers, suitable for small businesses, were beginning to be widely advertised. Two new entertainment formats, VHS video and CD recording, were being adopted with enthusiasm by Australian consumers. Newspaper advertisements advised private subscribers that they could now phone long distance within Australia 'direct' without needing to 'book' the call through an operator. Cigarette advertising was a prominent feature of daily newspapers.

In December, federal Treasurer Paul Keating announced the floating of the Australian dollar, a key structural reform that opened the Australian economy to the world and allowed important changes, including the decline in domestic manufacturing, to begin and proceed, thereby ensuring the Australian economy reflected global shifts and developments.