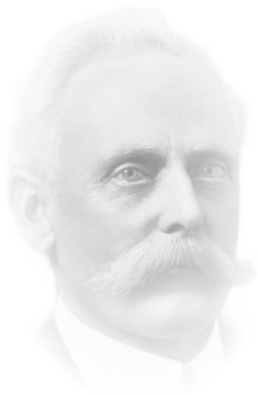




*A Centenary of Achievement*  
**National Party of Australia**  
**1920-2020**



**100**



**Re-enactment  
Legislative Assembly,  
Parliament of Victoria  
Melbourne, 13 March 2020**

*of the explanation given to Parliament on  
10 March 1920 as to why the Australian Country  
Party was formed on 22 January 1920*

**and**

*of the Conference of Country Party delegates  
held in Melbourne on 23-24 March 1926 that  
formed the Federal Organisation under the name  
of the Australian Country Party Association*

# **Re-enactment Participants**

*(in order of appearance)*

The Rt. Hon. Ian Sinclair AC as the  
Speaker of the House of Representatives,  
the Hon. W. Elliott Johnson, Member for Lang, NSW

The Hon. Jeanette Powell, vocalist

The Hon. Michael McCormack, Deputy Prime Minister,  
Federal Leader, National Party of Australia,  
Member for Riverina, NSW

Mr Kristian Jenkins as William James McWilliams,  
Federal Leader, Australian Country Party,  
Member for Franklin, Tasmania

The Hon. Don Page reciting the Minutes of the  
23-24 March 1926 Conference which formed the  
Australian Country Party Association

## **Production Assistants**

Script - compiled by Paul Davey  
Sound – Bruce Adderley, Sound Studios, Shepparton  
Videography – Paul Swain, Furnace Content, Sydney  
Photography – Simon Woodcock, Conference Photography  
Australia, Melbourne



### **3.00pm – Mr. Speaker, the Hon. W. Elliott Johnson, enters the Chamber.**

**Mr. Speaker:** The House will come to order. Please stand for the Lord's Prayer.

*Almighty God, we humbly beseech Thee to vouch safe Thy blessing upon this Parliament. Direct and prosper our deliberations to the advancement of Thy glory, and the true welfare of the people of Australia.*

*Our Father, which art in heaven,  
Hallowed by thy Name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive them that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
But deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom,  
The power and the glory,  
For ever and ever. Amen.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Please remain standing for the National Anthem.

**Hon. Jeanette Powell:** Advance Australia Fair

*Australians all let us rejoice,  
For we are young and free;  
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;  
Our home is girt by sea;  
Our land abounds in nature's gifts  
Of beauty rich and rare;  
In history's page,  
let every stage Advance Australia Fair.  
In joyful strains then let us sing,  
Advance Australia Fair.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Please be seated. I call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Federal Leader of the National Party of Australia, the Hon. Michael McCormack.

**Hon. Michael McCormack (Riverina) - Deputy Prime Minister, Leader of The Nationals:** Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here today for this historic event.

Let us begin with an Acknowledgement of Country:

*“We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.”*

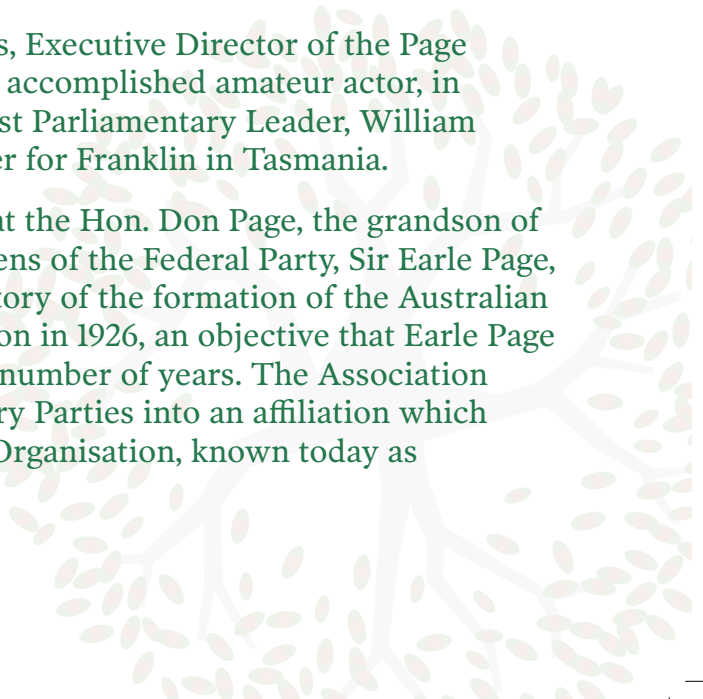
This re-enactment commemorates the birth 100 years ago of the Australian Country Party and the explanation given to Parliament, here in Melbourne on 10 March 1920, of the reason for its formation.

I am delighted to welcome the Rt. Hon. Ian Sinclair, in the role of Speaker of the House of Representatives at that time.

Ian is ideally suited to do this, as he is the only Country or National Party parliamentarian in the Party’s history to have been elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives, holding the position in 1998.

We have Kristian Jenkins, Executive Director of the Page Research Centre, and an accomplished amateur actor, in the role of the Party’s first Parliamentary Leader, William McWilliams, the Member for Franklin in Tasmania.

It is extremely fitting that the Hon. Don Page, the grandson of one of the founding doyens of the Federal Party, Sir Earle Page, is with us to relate the story of the formation of the Australian Country Party Association in 1926, an objective that Earle Page had been pursuing for a number of years. The Association brought the State Country Parties into an affiliation which established the Federal Organisation, known today as Federal Council.



Don Page followed in his grandfather's political footsteps, although at the State, rather than Federal, level. He was the Member for Ballina in NSW for 27 years to 2015, a State Government Minister and Deputy State National Party Leader.

As we have already seen and heard, an important role is being played by a former Victorian Nationals parliamentarian, the Hon. Jeanette Powell. She is an accomplished vocalist and having led us in singing the National Anthem, will do so again as the Anthem was in 1920, as God Save the King.

Jeanette was the first National Party woman to be elected to the Victorian Parliament. She was elected to the Legislative Council from 1996 until 2002, when she moved to the Legislative Assembly as the Member for Shepparton, becoming a State Government Minister until her retirement in 2014.

We have many more dignitaries and special guests with us who will be introduced as the day proceeds.

For now, ladies and gentlemen, I return you to the Speaker!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! The House will come to order.

We now take ourselves one hundred years back in time.

We are meeting in the Chamber of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Victoria. It was here under an agreement between the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments that the Commonwealth Parliament met from Federation in 1901 until moving to the provisional Parliament House in Canberra on 9 May 1927.

On 22 January 1920, a group of nine Members of the House of Representatives, who had been elected at the December 1919 election and who supported the objectives of the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation, known as the AFFO, agreed to establish the Australian Country Party.

These nine members were joined by two more on 24 February 1920. They convened a Party Meeting the next day, 25 February - the day before the opening of the new Parliament.

The meeting was chaired by the Member for Corangamite, Victoria, William Gibson. It agreed to elect interim leaders, so the members could assess each other's strengths and weaknesses before settling on a longer term leadership team.

The Member for Franklin in Tasmania, William McWilliams, was elected Leader, with Edmund Jowett (Grampians, Victoria) Deputy Leader and Earle Page (Cowper, NSW) Secretary and Whip.

The new Country Party team assembled the following day to hear the Governor-General's address opening the eighth Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.

We move to Wednesday 10 March 1920 and the opening of the day's proceedings in the House of Representatives.

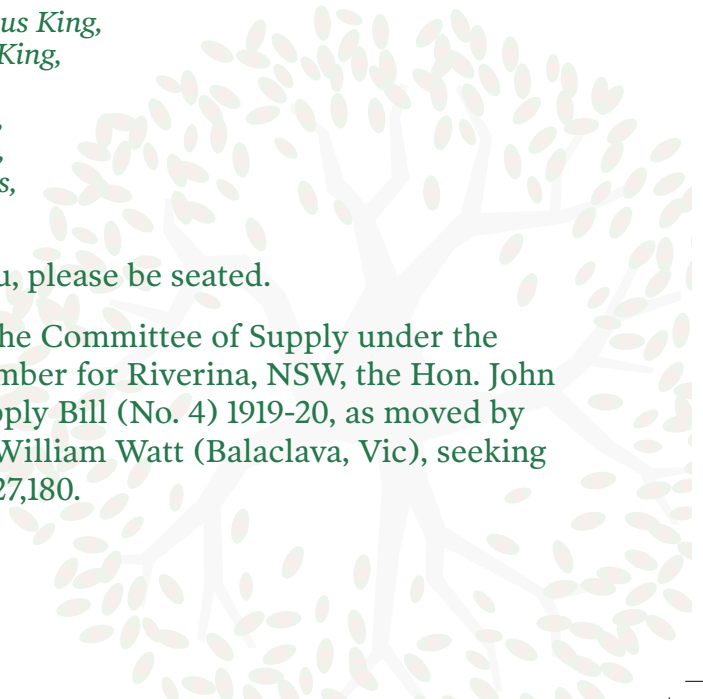
Please stand for God Save the King [George V, 1910-1936].

**Hon. Jeanette Powell:** God Save the King

*God save our gracious King,  
Long live our noble King,  
God save the King!  
Send him victorious,  
Happy and glorious,  
Long to reign over us,  
God save the King!*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, please be seated.

The House is sitting as the Committee of Supply under the chairmanship of the Member for Riverina, NSW, the Hon. John Chanter, to consider Supply Bill (No. 4) 1919-20, as moved by the Treasurer, the Hon. William Watt (Balaclava, Vic), seeking an appropriation of £5,727,180.



The Honourable Member for Franklin has the call.

**Mr. McWilliams (Franklin):** In terms of the notice of motion previously given I move – That the proposed sum be reduced by £2,863,590. The object is to limit the term of Supply to six weeks. I think it is desirable that I should take this early opportunity – the first real opportunity that I have had – to inform the Government, their supporters, and the members of the Opposition of the exact position of members occupying the cross benches, and who constitute the Australian Country Party, which has done me the great honour of electing me as its leader.

I may say at the outset that the Country Party is an independent body quite separate from the Nationalists or the Labour Party. I think it my duty to let honourable members of this House and the country generally know exactly the position in which we stand.

We occupy our own party rooms, we have appointed our own Leader and other officers. We take no part in the deliberations of Ministerialists or of the Opposition. We intend to support measures of which we approve, and hold ourselves absolutely free to criticise or reject any proposals with which we do not agree. Having put our hands to the wheel, we set the course of our voyage. There has been no collusion, we crave no alliance, we spurn no support; we have no desire to harass the Government, nor do we wish to humiliate the Opposition. We have not entered upon this course without giving the matter the most grave consideration. ... We have recognised – as have other honourable members and a considerable number of electors – that drastic action was necessary to secure closer attention to the requirements of the primary producers of Australia than they have hitherto received. The primary producer is determined that he shall now take his proper place. We have no quarrel with the consumers in the cities. We regard them, in part, as our best customers.



I desire to take the opportunity of stating that members of the Country Party, as the direct representatives of the primary producers, have declared war against those Trusts and Combines whose prosperity has been gained alike at the expense of the farmers and of the consumer. We have entered deliberately upon a campaign against unnecessary intermediaries. We seek to bring the consumer and the producer into closer touch so that the farmer may obtain a fair return for his products, and the consumer be able to purchase at fair and reasonable prices. ...

There are other planks in our platform which I shall briefly outline. We stand for economy in public administration. For the last ten years the Commonwealth has indulged in a veritable carnival of financial folly. We have borrowed largely, we have spent unwisely. We have issued paper money until we have almost submerged the Plimsoll mark of financial safety. As a party, we have made up our minds that the time has come to cry a halt, and put our house back in order by a reduction in Departments which have become unwieldy and expensive to a degree that would be ludicrous were the matter not so serious. The overlapping of Federal and State administration must receive immediate consideration. And, above all, there must be a return to parliamentary control of the public purse. ...

In trying to put before the Committee the opinions of members with whom I am associated, I have studiously avoided saying anything that could be fairly construed as a threat. I have deemed it proper, in fairness to the Government, to myself, to members of my party, and our constituents that I should take this early opportunity of defining the attitude and aspirations of the Country Party. ...

We, the members of the Country Party ... wish our position to be made perfectly clear. We claim that before any taxation be levied, before any additional burdens are placed on the people, economy in administration, and parliamentary responsibility,

shall be strictly enforced as all important. ... That is one of the planks of our platform. On the principles that I have tried to explain, the Australian Country Party will stand or fall.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Order! Honourable Members will resume their seats.

**Mr. Speaker:** Ladies and gentlemen, I now want to take you forward six years – to 23 March 1926. We're still in Melbourne, although not in this place. We are at the Independent Hall in Collins Street.

The Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation has convened a conference of 60 Country Party delegates from Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia, including one woman delegate from each State.

The purpose of the conference is to consider establishing a Federal organisation of the Party - the brainchild of the Treasurer and Member for Cowper in New South Wales, the Hon. Dr Earle Page, a founding member of the Australian Country Party and its Parliamentary Leader since 5 April 1921.

Dr Page was keen to establish a Federal organisational structure that could develop a closer relationship with the State parties and help broaden electoral appeal to a wider section of the community than farmers and graziers.

The minutes of the conference take up the story, as narrated by Earle Page's grandson, the Hon. Don Page:

**Hon. Don Page:** In welcoming delegates to the conference, Dr Page stated that in his opinion the time had come to carefully define the real aim and mission of the Country political movement, to examine their methods of organisation, and to determine whether those methods could be improved to secure greater and increased results. The mission of the country political movement was to restore a proper balance

to national life, and it was actuated both by the self interest of the country dwellers and the national interest. The country movement aimed to improve the position of the nation as a whole, by increasing its absorptive capacity for new comers and increasing national efficiency. By improving the conditions of the countryside, it aimed to make new centres of opportunity throughout the continent, bring the producer into closer contact with the consumer, and shorten the road to the market by eliminating waste in every way, thereby improving the position of the individual and assuring him a larger net return for his labour, whether they lived in the country or in the city.

After further debate, Dr Page moved the following motion:

That this conference, recognising the community of interest between all classes of country residents, whether engaged in primary production, secondary industries, business or other avocations, considers it is necessary for combined action to be taken for the amended organisation of the Australian Country Party so as to form a political organisation, to which all electors whose sympathies are with the policy of the organisation may belong.

The motion was carried unanimously.

The Conference then agreed to appoint a Committee of twelve, representing all States and the Federal Parliamentary Party, to draw up a Constitution to be submitted to Conference at 9.15am the following day, 24 March 1926. On Conference reassembling, Mr William Carroll, Senator-elect from Western Australia, moved:

That this conference representing the various producing interests throughout the Commonwealth recommends to the A.F.F.O. and the various State organisations the formation of an Australian Country Party Association.

The motion was carried unanimously.



Mr Carroll then presented the Committee's Constitution report and in doing so said he could assure delegates that it represented the considered opinion of the Committee. The Committee's recommendations as amended were adopted on the motion of Messrs Carroll and W H Doherty, of Queensland.

The Constitution named the organisation The Australian Country Party Association.

It provided for the State Country parties to become affiliated with the Association, and set the affiliation fee for the first year at £50 each for NSW and Victoria and £25 each for Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania.

It provided for the establishment of a Central Council of 23 members, being -

- The Federal Leader
- Two other representatives elected by members of the Federal Parliamentary Country Party
- Three members each from the Country Party organisations of NSW and Victoria
- Two members each from the Party organisations in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania, and,
- One woman representative appointed by the affiliated women's organisations in each State.

The Constitution gave Central Council the power to 'have the entire management of the affairs of the Association, subject to the Constitution', and to -

- Appoint annually a Chairman, Secretary and such other officers as may be necessary
- Direct and supervise organisation and propaganda work in co-operation with the State Organisations if necessary, and
- Construct and or amend the policy based on the platform of the Party in consultation with the Federal Parliamentary Party.

The conference closed with votes of thanks to the President of the AFFO, Edgar Hunt, and Dr Page.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Order! From this point on, ladies and gentlemen, the State Country Parties were a formal part of the Federal Party – and so it remains to this day.

We are a federation of independent State parties, just as the Commonwealth is a federation of States. Each State party has its own Constitution and Rules and each also supports the Federal Constitution. In contrast, the Liberal and Labor parties work on a more centralised basis, with their State bodies being divisions or branches respectively of their Federal organisations.

While the Party Constitution has evolved to meet changing circumstances, its core provisions remain the same today as those of the founding document. That is testimony to stability, which is the foundation stone of our unity and our longevity.

In closing, on behalf of the National Party I place on record our sincere thanks to the Speaker and Members of the Victorian Legislative Assembly for allowing the use of their Chamber for this event.

Could I have a motion that the House do now adjourn?

**Mr. McWilliams (Franklin):** So moved, Mr Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** All those in favour say ‘aye’. Those against?

The motion is carried. We will move to the Queen’s Hall where there will be a ceremonial cutting of the National Party Centenary Commemorative Cake. The House is now adjourned.

*Sources:*

*Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives Hansard, 10 March 1920, pp. 243, 250, 251, 258.*

*Minutes of Conference, convened by the Australian Farmers’ Federal Organisation of Country Party delegates, Independent Hall, Collins Street, Melbourne, 23-24 March 1926.*

# **Queen's Hall Parliament of Victoria**

## **Centenary Commemorative Cake**

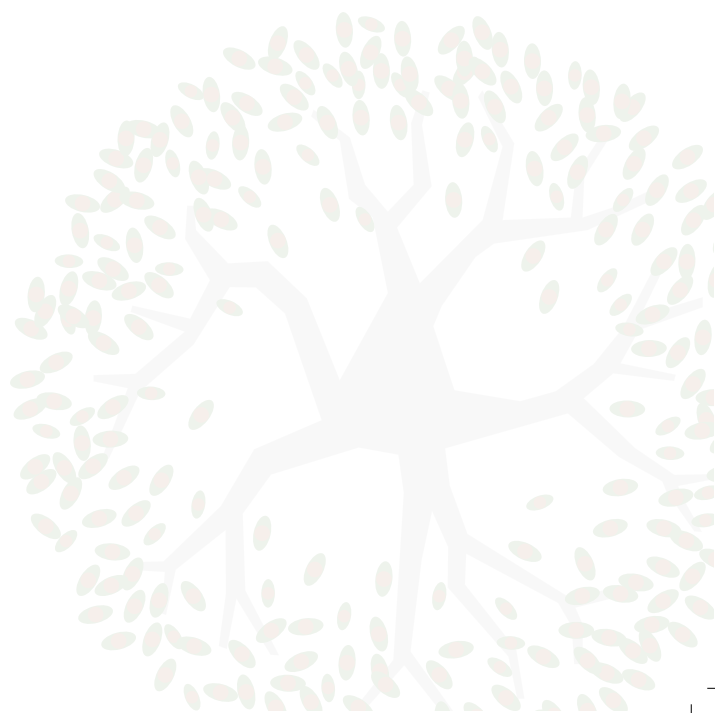
Welcome by the Hon. Peter Walsh  
Parliamentary Leader, Victorian Nationals  
Deputy Leader of the Opposition

and

Introduction of descendants of

The Rt. Hon. Dr Earle Christmas Grafton Page  
and  
The Hon. William Gerrand Gibson

to cut the Centenary Commemorative Cake



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**THE NATIONALS**

*for Regional Australia*

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CENTENARY 1920 - 2020

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Authorised by Jonathan Hawkes, National Party of Australia, John McEwen House,  
National Circuit, Barton, ACT 2600. March 2020.