Tribute to Neville Wran

Last month Labor lost one of its greats when Neville Wran passed away at the age of 87.

A true giant of the labour movement, Wran campaigned hard and successfully to win back country seats. In 1973 Labor won just six of the 33 country electorates. However, between 1973 and 1976, Wran spent significant time and effort campaigning in country NSW. Detailed analysis of the state and federal voting patterns over these years showed that Wran’s efforts enabled voters to distinguish between NSW and Federal Labor.

On gaining government in 1976, Wran commissioned the refurbishment of country court houses around the state and re-opened court houses which had been closed in some small, distant, country towns under the Coalition government. He also transferred the NSW Police Academy from the decrepit home in Redfern to Goulburn, and established probation and parole offices in country areas which had previously been restricted to metropolitan areas and just a few country towns with prisons.

Wran prided himself on forest preservation, particularly in the north east of the state and significantly increased the total area dedicated to National Parks. He was admired for his winning ways which showed when, at the 1986 State Conference, country delegates were incredulous and saddened when the great man unexpectedly announced his resignation. To which the shocked delegates spontaneously implored No! No!

His commitment to the labour movement and to country NSW will never be forgotten.

A message from the Country Organiser

This month we pay tribute to one of our greatest Labor Leaders, the Hon Neville Wran QC. Like all of us in the labour movement, we were saddened to hear of his passing.

Reflecting on his legacy reminds us of the sheer magnitude of his achievements.

Most importantly for us in Country Labor, Wran showed us how to win back country electorates. After his narrow victory in 1976, despite the well-documented and broad anti-Whitlam sentiment across rural and regional NSW, Wran set out to win back country seats. He offered a strong country-specific policy agenda, and tirelessly visited country areas, engaging with locals.

A true model for us all across the labour movement, may he now rest in peace.

Courtney Roche
NSW COUNTRY ORGANISER
Free trade opportunity hampered by government inaction

The Australia-Japan Free Trade Agreement puts the focus squarely on the Liberal-National Government to end its complete inaction on agricultural exports from NSW.

“The Agreement is not perfect for NSW agriculture, in particular the failure to strike an agreement which allows better access for our rice is a major flaw,” Shadow Minister for Primary Industry Steve Whan said.

NSW is Australia’s most successful rice exporter but unfortunately rice has not featured in the improvements under this Free Trade Agreement. According to the National Farmers’ Federation dairy, sugar, grain and pork have also missed out.

Despite these drawbacks the new Agreement does offer new opportunities for NSW beef and horticulture, with the increase allowed for dairy products also something NSW could pursue.

The question is can NSW take advantage of the opportunities this new Agreement offers?

Agricultural exports to Asia are a major opportunity for NSW. We have clean, green products; we have a strong export record; and we have the capacity to do much more.

Steve Whan says the Liberal-National Government has done little on agricultural exports.

It’s time for this Government to stop sitting on its hands and get on with developing industry specific export strategies.

Protecting regional rail corridors

Shadow Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services Mick Veitch has introduced a private member’s bill into the NSW Parliament that aims to keep regional rail corridors in public hands.

This will allow surrounding communities the opportunity to use them for recreation and tourism.

Labor’s bill allows disused rail corridors to be converted into a Rail Trail – a walking/cycling track that can be built either alongside or on the existing railway track.

Under Labor’s bill, ownership of the corridor remains with Transport for NSW and will not be transferred to Crown Lands. This protects the corridors from the Liberal-National Government selling them off to the highest bidder.

“We need to create opportunities for regional communities so they can diversify their economies – allowing them to use disused rail corridors for recreational and tourism attractions is a no-brainer,” Mick Veitch said.

Not only do Rail Trails allow local communities to use these defunct assets for meaningful purposes it also keeps the corridors available for future use for their original purpose – train services for regional communities.

NSW Labor will fight the sell off of regional rail corridors.
Opposition Leader John Robertson said we have already seen Mike Baird’s plans to privatise electricity and broaden the base of the GST. This will make life harder for families across the state.

Mike Baird needs to understand that he cannot run our state’s hospitals like an investment bank,”

John Robertson said.

As Treasurer, Mike Baird has overseen a $3 billion cut to hospitals in NSW. This has only put more pressure on doctors, nurses and health professionals.

Recent experiences with the privatisation of hospitals had shown important services such as teaching the next generation of doctors and nurses would no longer be provided.

When the Liberals privatised a hospital in Port Macquarie in the 1990s it was a complete disaster – forcing the government to buy the hospital back in 2005. In Port Macquarie the private sector was unable to provide healthcare for everyone – effectively NSW paid for the hospital twice.

Hands off medicare

Liberals’ secret plan for tax on visits to Emergency

The Liberal-National Government needs to come clean on any discussions it has had with its Federal Liberal colleagues on a plan to introduce a fee to attend NSW hospital emergency departments.

Reports say the Abbott Liberal Government has a secret plan to allow State Governments to impose a charge on patients who report to hospital with what turn out to be less serious ailments.

The hospital tax would work alongside the Liberal Party’s proposed $6 tax to the visit the GP.

This is nothing more than an attack on universal access to health care. If the Liberals and Nationals implement their plans – patients will have to swipe their credit card just to get treatment at a hospital.

Many in the community are finding it tough to make ends meet at the moment. We shouldn’t be making it harder for them to get access to a hospital or a GP if they are sick.
Government trashes wilderness regions

Shadow Minister for the Environment Luke Foley has slammed the Government for throwing open some of NSW’s most pristine and unique wilderness areas to horse riding.

The Liberal-National Government have now revealed five new wilderness areas that were previously protected will be opened to horse riding in a two year trial. The Wilderness Areas now open to horse riding are Kosciuszko, Deua, Monga and Mummel Gulf National Parks.

The Act explicitly directs that wilderness areas should only be open to “self-reliant” recreation. Riding a horse is hardly self-reliant. The heart of our alpine wilderness is not the place to be sanctioning the use of large introduced species disturbing and trampling our unique and pristine environment.

Hard hoofed animals undermine the fragile soils of the Australian bush. Horses are larger than most native animals. The damage they cause allows unnatural amounts of sun onto the bush floor, helping establish weeds carried in on horses’ flanks and in their droppings.

Horse-riding is totally inappropriate in protected wilderness areas. These areas were set aside under ground breaking wilderness legislation established 27 years ago by the former Environment Minister Bob Carr to preserve the biodiversity and beauty of these areas from human interference,” Luke Foley said.

The two terms I represented Monaro in the NSW Parliament produced big results for our area. Working with local communities Labor delivered hundreds of capital works projects, extra nurses, teachers, police and our region saw a sustained period of growth in jobs.

“Since the 2011 election the Nationals have attacked the working conditions of our public sector workers, including nurses, teachers and police. There has been a massive $3 billion cut to NSW hospitals, cuts to schools and fire services, and the very real prospect of the decimation of TAFE.

“The Nationals have gone back to their old ways, delivering excuses instead of results. I’m will be standing again because Monaro communities deserve to get their fair share,” Steve Whan said.

Steve Whan says Monaro can’t be allowed to wither under the Nationals.