



**NORTHERN TERRITORY
of AUSTRALIA**

THE OPPOSITION

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
GARY HIGGINS MLA
Member for Daly

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
LIA FINOCCHIARO MLA
Member for Spillett

HANSARD EXTRACT

CONDOLENCE MOTION

Hon Frederick 'Fred' Finch AM

(Thursday, 14 March 2019)

This extract is taken from the Draft Daily Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, and will be subject to further edits by the Hansard Unit before incorporation into the Parliamentary Record.

Delivered in the Legislative Assembly Chamber

PARLIAMENT HOUSE, MITCHELL STREET, DARWIN N.T. 0800

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett):

Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on behalf of the opposition to honor the life of a highly respected former long-term resident of Darwin and a former distinguished minister and member of this Assembly.

The Honorable Frederick Arthur Finch AM was born in Port Kembla, New South Wales on 16 June 1945. On 12 November last year he passed away peacefully at his home. Fred was the loving husband of Lyn; father to Georgie, Suzi and Kate; father-in-law to Alan, Andrew and Darran; and much loved Pa to Laura, Connor, Spencer and Tenzin; many of whom are in the gallery today.

I take this opportunity today to speak about the variety of interests, achievements and public service of this man, whose contribution to our community was immense and who left behind a huge legacy for Territorians.

Fred was the driving force and founding member of Surf Life Saving in the Territory and a true Territory icon. Fred's passing will be felt across the greater Surf Life Saving family where he is recognised as a great Australia by the community he was so passionate about.

Fred served as an active participant, president and coach of Surf Life Saving for over 15 years. It was at the Port Kembla Surf Life Saving Club that he began his surf career. As a competitor, Fred's strength lay

in the chariot race, where he received both state and Australian medals.

He also won branch flags for the flag sprint and the relay. Fred spearheaded several building projects through the club, including the boat shed. Fred's father, who was also a member of Port Kembla, was a strong boat rower and a Councillor for the Wollongong City Council.

After Fred's graduation at the University of Wollongong in 1969, where he obtained a Bachelor of Science and Civil Engineering, Fred worked for the Sydney Water Board.

After nine years, Fred left the Water Board to work with a private engineering firm centralised around areas of land development, civil construction and consulting engineering.

He accepted a new position managing a small consulting office on Queensland's Sunshine Coast in 1972 before a transfer offer to Darwin was extended to the then 27-year-old. He became a partner with Brian Colless and the company Colless and Finch Pty Limited was born in 1977. Fred remained a partner in this company until 1983.

First joining Engineers Australia as a member in 1969 as a student, Fred earned his Chartered status in 1973 before his election as President of the Institute of Engineers Australia in 1982. Fred

eventually obtained his fellowship status in 1988.

Following the devastation of Cyclone Tracy in December 1974, Fred's public service duties to the Northern Territory began by overseeing the structural requirements for private sector reconstruction. With the destruction of more than 70% of Darwin's buildings, including 80% of Darwin's housing, this was no small task. Like many dedicated and passionate professionals at the time, Fred's contribution to the rebuild should not be underestimated.

During his career Fred was a lecturer in engineering at Darwin Community College and later in his life, as Education minister, was a great supporter of the then NTU and later Charles Darwin University.

Mark Monaghan, Engineers Australia Northern Territory Division General Manager, in paying tribute to Fred, said:

It is with a heavy heart that we farewell one of the Territory's most influential engineers. His contribution to all aspects of the Northern Territory was immense, his dedication to the engineering sector unwavering and the legacy his work will leave is certainly something to behold

In 1983, Fred, encouraged by the then Chief Minister, Paul Everingham, stood for the CLP and won the seat of Wagaman. He represented that electorate until 1987. Following a redistribution, Fred then

represented the electorate of Leanyer until his retirement from political life in 1997.

Fred had a remarkable career in politics spanning 14 years and served as a minister in the Hatton, Perron and Stone governments, also serving as:

- Minister for Transport and Works (1987–1992)
- Minister for Racing and Gaming (1989–1990) and (1996–1997)
- Minister for Education and Training in (1992–1995) and (1996–1997)
- Minister for Public Employment (1992–1994) and (1995–1997)
- Attorney-General (1994–1995)
- Minister for Health Services (1995–1996)
- Minister for the Liquor Commission (1995–1996).

During his public career, Fred was also Chairman of the NT Training Bureau from 1997–2000 and Chairman of the NT Planning Authority from 1998–2002.

We hear much said in this place about youth, an increase in youth crime and what should or should not be done to address this massive social issue in our community. Let me read from the maiden speech of

Frederick Arthur Finch MLA, Member for Wagaman, and reflect for a moment on the words of wisdom he spoke in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday 29 February 1984:

I support the need to provide further youth facilities and recreational activities for people in this area. Our youth policy focuses attention on these needs and is to be commended by all.

On completion of facilities such as the magnificent Marrara sporting complex and the extensions which are currently under construction at Casuarina High School, it can be seen that we are well on the way to satisfactorily providing suitable venues for youth activities.

These activities will provide not only for young peoples' needs, but will cater also for the public at large.

They will become a tremendous asset to the northern suburbs. However, work will still be needed to ensure that our future generations are given the best opportunities for full and productive development.

From previous experience with school groups, swimming clubs and various other sporting bodies; girl guides and other youth groups, I am also concerned that we should be attempting to encourage greater family involvement, particularly in the development of those vital areas of education, social attitude, self-discipline and development of character.

Whilst governments and educators can do and play a significant role through the provision of supportive services and facilities, there is no

substitute for caring, paternal involvement. How we tackle this problem, however, I am not certain. But, it is certain that we must try.

Wise words indeed. All of us in this house would do well to remember them.

It was Fred's nature to always put the Territory first. This was no clearer in 1994 when he suffered his third heart attack. He had suffered two previous heart attacks in two months in 1987, the first within weeks of his appointment to the ministry. When asked if he would change anything, his response was:

Not being involved in my work would be more stressful than me being involved.

He went on to say that he had always been a workaholic and that he enjoyed his job. Fred quipped that instead of going to work at 6 am, he might go to work at 7 am and spend half an hour exercising every second day. The Territory and his ministerial responsibilities always came first and his health came second.

Fred had a passion for the Territory. His brushing aside of his third heart attack, declaring things to be, 'Business as usual', was very typical of the man who said at the time:

I had a fitness test for my pilot's licence. I was 50% fitter than the average man half my age.

Speaking in the hallowed Chamber of what we call Parliament House causes me to reflect on what State Square may have looked like if it were not for Fred Finch, who was the then Minister for Transport and Works. According to former Deputy Chief Minister, Barry Coulter, who is in the gallery today, Fred was essentially the project manager for the State Square project.

His engineering expertise stood the government in good stead. He oversaw and reviewed every single aspect of that great project, ensuring that Territorians got value for money and an outstanding and unique Parliament House and Supreme Court.

As Minister for Transport and Works, Fred was relentless in his pursuit of the Commonwealth Government to build a new Darwin Airport. According to Barry, Fred did everything he could to embarrass them, time and time again, until the decision was finally taken to build it under the auspices of the then Airports Corporation. His engineering expertise came to the fore time and time again. The community halls at Freds Pass, Berry Springs and Humpty Doo are classic examples of the legacy he left for these thriving communities.

Fred was one of the best known Education ministers this Territory has ever had. Fred visited schools across the Territory and all the children knew and loved him. I happen to have been one of those children at the time. It was a special treat for the children if Fred the minister visited your school on his birthday and you got to sing Happy

Birthday to him and have a great big cake for morning tea.

Barry Coulter recalls that one of the least known things about Fred, the engineer, was his participation as a member of the cultural club. Fred, with back bench CLP colleagues, the now deceased Don Dale and the then Member for Karama, Mick Palmer, visited museums and art galleries, interviewed famous members of the Australian arts community, including, I am told, Sir Robert Helpmann, to get an insight into how the government of the day could bring arts and culture to prominence in the Territory. A most unlikely pursuit for an engineer, but a responsibility that Barry Coulter said Fred took on with great gusto.

Apart from the many roads, bridges and buildings that were completed under Fred's stewardship, and remain as his legacy to this day, Fred will be remembered as a hands-on minister with the most incredible network across the Territory. He was a man who could get to the bottom of an issue with a few phone calls, fixing whatever the problem in no time. Barry said, 'We could do well with a few more people like Fred Finch today, that is for sure'.

Former Chief Minister Marshall Perron asked that I share some of his memories of his friend and colleague in this condolence motion:

*Husband, father, engineer, local member and minister of the Crown—
I knew him well as the last three and observed him as the first two. Fred*

was a thoroughly decent man at every level. We worked together in government for twelve years, sharing a passion and vision for building a Territory we could all be proud of.

Unlike some of our colleagues in politics, Fred was not on an ego trip. He took the job seriously, he did his homework, he understood the electorate and had a real empathy for the unfortunate in our community. He was a solid member of the CLP team and could be relied upon completely to represent the Territory at any forum here or abroad with the dignity and honour that the occasion required. Above all, Fred had that most important attribute any man can have—integrity.

I regard Fred Finch as a friend as well as a valued colleague. The Territory is a better place today because of Fred Finch and this country would be a better place if there were more people like him in parliament.

Daryl Manzie also reflected on his friendship with Fred and asked if we recount some stories. Daryl recounted how Fred loved his golf and was a member of the Darwin Golf Club. Daryl, Paul Everingham and Fred would meet at the golf club at 6 am and during their round would solve all the political issues of the day, particularly those that related to the northern suburbs. They laughed and joked, and Fred was a very happy person with a great sense of humour.

Fred was involved in an infamous drive of a prime mover backwards from Katherine to Darwin. As Minister for Transport and Works, Fred was concerned about the significant increases in fees for truck

drivers in proposed national uniform legislation. He thought the fees would make the transport industry go backwards and so he and others drove the truck backwards as a symbol of his opposition.

Another time Fred brought attention to the federal government's action—or lack thereof—with his campaign to get the new Darwin airport terminal built—a matter that caused him great concern about the Labor government's lack of action. He organised a working bee of Greek and other local construction companies, and with the developer said, 'We will build it ourselves'.

Fred would also go to the wharfies' Grey Collar Club—a tin/fibro shed—and have a few beers with the workers. Daryl and Fred would have lunch at the club and the members of the club would say, 'You are better than those Labor members. Brian Ede and his Labor mates have never come here for a drink or a meal.' Those memories are attributed to Daryl Manzie.

One of Fred's great strengths was his 'stirrer' or 'spoiler' role in the parliament and his ability to operate at a grassroots level and be an important barometer for Darwin's northern suburbs. He did this consistently and did not hold back in his final days in the Assembly when directing his comments towards the then Member for Wanguri for letterboxing in his electorate. He suggested to him that he should stop doorknocking because he was 'scaring the dogs and the kids'. Fred loved his electorate and his constituents and they truly loved and respected him. That is why, time and

time again, he achieved a clear majority at the polls.

Fred's final speech captured the essence of the man when he said:

In reflecting on my 14 years in parliament, 10 of them in Cabinet, I can walk out of this Chamber when the time comes knowing that I have contributed positively to the wellbeing of my electorate and its development and to the wellbeing of Territorians through the various portfolios that I have held.

He walked away with his head held high in the knowledge that he had given it his all.

In January 2007, Fred was a recipient of the Member of the Order of Australia for his service to the community of the Northern Territory through the Legislative Assembly particularly in the portfolio responsibilities of education, health, public works, the surf lifesaving movement, and NT Rugby Union.

Fred was a person who gave so freely to the Northern Territory community. His community work included Director of the National Council, Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA), 1987 to 2003; being awarded a life member of Surf Life Saving Australia in 2003; public officer, Surf Lifesaving NT; inaugural Chair and President, 1989 to 2003; life member, Surf Lifesaving NT 1999; interim Chair for negotiations with Surf Life Saving Australia and Northern Territory leading to

surf lifesaving autonomy for the Northern Territory in 1987 to 1989; Deputy President, Darwin Surf Life Saving Club, 1984 to 1987; Chairman of the Building Committee; providing coaching and team management support from 1984 to 2003; Lions Club of Darwin Casuarina member for 20 years and served as president, zone chairman and district governor; President of Port Kembla Surf Life Saving Club from 1970 to 1973; and committee member, 1968 to 1973.

Fred was also awarded the Australian Sports Medal in 2000.

Fred also showed great interest in the game of rugby union in the Northern Territory, holding a number of executive roles in the Territory while maintaining a presence on the field. He was: a life member of NT Rugby Union, 2006; vice-patron from 2004 to 2005; treasurer from 2001 to 2002; patron of the NT Junior Rugby Union and also served as a committee member; and patron of the Dragons Rugby Union Club for the period 1988 to 2001.

He served as patron of a range of sporting organisations including NT Rugby Referees' Association, NT Softball Association and NT Touch Association.

Fred was appointed a Director of Lasseters Corporation Limited in 1999 and was appointed as Fellow, Institution of Engineers Australia in 1988.

Frederick Arthur Finch, known to everyone simply as Fred, at five feet tall or thereabouts, was a giant of a man, both in and outside of the Legislative Assembly. At all times he had the best interests of Territorians at heart. His extensive work in the community, whether in or outside of the parliament, is a testament to a man whose discipline, logic and analytical ability helped him get on with the job and get the job done. He impacted positively on the lives of countless Territorians.

Above all else, Fred was a family man. To him, his family was everything.

I extend my condolences to Fred's family on behalf of Gary Higgins and me. Thank you for sharing Fred with us. The Northern Territory is a better place because of him.