

John Malcolm FRASER, PC, AC, CH

Prime Minister 11 November 1975 to 11 March 1983



- Malcolm Fraser became Australia's 22nd prime minister after the dismissal of Gough Whitlam's Labor government by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr.
- Member of the Liberal Party of Australia since 1952. Member of House of Representatives for Wannon (Victoria) 1956-83. Minister for the Army 1966-68, Education and Science 1968-69, Defence 1969-71, Education and Science 1971-72.
- Fraser was replaced by the Australian Labor Party's Bob Hawke following defeat of the Liberal government at the polls.

Main achievements (1975-1983)

- Oversaw establishment of Family Court of Australia and Federal Court of Australia, Northern Territory self-government, passage of Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, creation of Federal Ombudsman, ABC FM radio; Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Australian Refugee Advisory Council, Aboriginal Development Commission.
- Ended mining of mineral sands from Fraser Island. Declared 36 000 square km of Cairns section of Great Barrier Reef as marine park. Introduced policy of uranium development with safeguards framework. Oversaw landmark 1978 decision to price local oil at world parity, resources boom through opening up new coalmines, North West Shelf, power stations and aluminium plants for investment.
- Championed multiculturalism including restoration of Australia's immigration program and acceptance of Vietnamese refugees. Introduced family allowances paid to mothers. Oversaw decision to build new Parliament House on Capital Hill.
- Prominent in international affairs. Supported independence movements in Africa and anti-apartheid boycotts against South Africa. Actively promoted Zimbabwe's independence. Called for global Common Fund to stabilise commodity prices.

Personal life

- Born 21 May 1930 in Melbourne. Grew up on family pastoral property; first outside Deniliquin, then 'Nareen' in western Victoria.
- Educated at Tudor House, Moss Vale; Melbourne Grammar; graduated from Oxford University 1952. Worked as grazier on family property.
- Married Tamara Beggs 9 December 1956 at Willaura, Victoria.



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Life after politics

- Chairman, United Nations Panel of Eminent Persons on the Role of Transnational Corporations in South Africa 1985, and joint Chairman, Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons on South Africa 1985-86. Chairman, United Nations Secretary-General's Expert Group on African Commodity Issues 1989-90.
- Formed CARE Australia, part of a network of humanitarian aid organisations, in 1987. President CARE International 1990-95. Special Envoy to Africa to achieve Australia's permanent seat on UN Security Council 1996. Led Commonwealth election observer mission to Pakistan 1997. As Special Envoy to Yugoslavia, secured release of two CARE Australia workers from prison.
- Awarded Human Rights Medal for contribution to advancement of human rights in Australia and internationally, 2000.

Character

- *John Malcolm Fraser was a rich farmer with a nation-building philosophy, an anti-communist ideologue, an aggressive politician ambitious for himself and his country, and a patrician imbued with a sense of public duty...Tall, thick-set, unsmiling and lethal, Fraser never overcame his own deep reserve to engage the public at an emotional level. His media critics loved to caricature him as a 'crazy grazier', reactionary and dull. Yet viewed from the Howard era, Fraser appears a progressive Liberal leader on multiculturalism, immigration, foreign policy and Aboriginal affairs...The 1975 crisis defined how most people saw Fraser, and perhaps also how he saw himself...Fraser was a master of process. Dominant, relentless and knowledgeable...To insiders Fraser was an awe-inspiring political executive with a near-unrivalled capacity...He was, in fact, an economic traditionalist and a modest social reformer.* (Source: *Australian Prime Ministers*, New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 2000, p 356)

Did you know?

- He became a member of parliament at 25, the youngest federal parliamentarian at that time.
- His Coalition government won the largest landslide of any federal election to 1975.
- He served 28 years in federal parliament.
- His grandfather was Sir Simon Fraser, a Victorian parliamentarian, delegate to the Australasian Federal Convention 1897-98, member of Reid's Free Trade Party from 1901, and Senator 1901-13.
- His most famous quote, 'life was not meant to be easy', was based on his belief in self-discipline and individual sacrifice in the cause of national progress. The quote is often attributed to George Bernard Shaw who wrote, in *Back to Methuselah* (1921): 'Life was not meant to be easy, my child, but take courage: it can be delightful'.

Sources

Kelly, Paul, 'Malcolm Fraser', in Michelle Grattan (ed), *Australian Prime Ministers*, New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 2000, pp 354-378

National Archives of Australia: <http://primeministers.naa.gov.au>

National Museum of Australia: www.nma.gov.au

Further reading

Ayres, Phillip, *Malcolm Fraser, a Biography*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1987

Fraser, Malcolm & Simons, Margaret, *Malcolm Fraser: The political memoirs*, Carlton, Vic. : The Miegunyah Press, 2010



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