

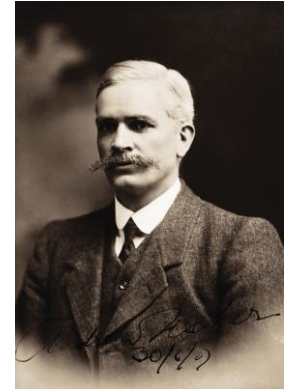
PRIME FACTS

AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTERS CENTRE

5

Andrew FISHER, PC

Prime Minister 13 November 1908 to 2 June 1909; 29 April 1910 to 24 June 1913; 17 September 1914 to 27 October 1915.



- Andrew Fisher became the 5th prime minister when the Liberal-Labor coalition government headed by Alfred Deakin collapsed due to loss of parliamentary Labor support.
- Fisher's first period as prime minister ended when the new Fusion Party of Deakin and Joseph Cook defeated the government in parliament.
- His second term resulted from an overwhelming Labor victory at elections in 1910. However, Labor lost power by one seat at the 1913 elections.
- Fisher was prime minister again in 1914, as a result of a double-dissolution election. Fisher resigned from office in October 1915, his health affected by the pressures of political life.
- Member of the Australian Labor Party c1901-28.
- Member of the House of Representatives for the seat of Wide Bay (Queensland) 1901-15; Minister for Trade and Customs 1904; Treasurer 1908-09, 1910-13, 1914-15.

Main achievements (1904-1915)

- Under his prime ministership, the Commonwealth Government issued its first currency which replaced bank and State currency as the only legal tender. Also, the Commonwealth Bank was established.
- Strengthened the Conciliation and Arbitration Act.
- Introduced a progressive land tax on unimproved properties.
- Construction began on the trans-Australian railway, linking Port Augusta and Kalgoorlie.
- Established the Australian Capital Territory and brought the Northern Territory under Commonwealth control.
- Established the Royal Australian Navy.
- Improved access to invalid and aged pensions and brought in maternity allowances.
- Introduced workers' compensation for federal public servants.
- Delegate to the Imperial Conference, London, 1911.
- Sent first Australian troops to Gallipoli in the First World War. Promised to support Britain to the last man and the last shilling.



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Personal life

- Born 29 August 1862, Ayrshire, Scotland. Died 22 October 1928, London.
- Educated Crosshouse Primary School, Ayrshire (c1867-72). Worked in coal mines from young age and became local secretary of the union. Migrated to Queensland 1885 and worked in mines at Burrum and Gympie. Active in the miners' union and the Presbyterian Church. Black-listed by mine owners, he became an engine driver. President of the Gympie branches of the miners' union and the Workers Political Organisation (which became the Queensland Labor Party), 1891. Elected to Queensland Legislative Assembly representing Gympie for the Labor Party 1892.
- Married Margaret Irvine at Gympie, Queensland, 31 December 1901.
- Returned to Australia for a year in 1921 after serving as High Commissioner in London from 1916 but then returned to London, where he died in 1928.

Life after politics

- Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom 1916-21.

Character

- *Tall and well-built, with a long black moustache and sandy hair, he was confident and determined to succeed, but his manner was quiet and his approach conciliatory...His contemporaries saw him as honest and trustworthy. (Source: Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 8, MUP, 1981, pp. 503, 507)*

Did you know?

- In 1910, he was the first prime minister with a majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- He was one of the most successful Australian politicians because of the significant reforms he introduced. During his second term (1910-13), more than 110 Acts were legislated. Along with Deakin, he founded the statutory structure of the new nation.
- In 1911 Fisher's government named the wattle as Australia's national flower and added it as background to the Commonwealth coat of arms

Sources

Murphy, D. J., 'Fisher, Andrew (1862 - 1928)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 8, MUP, 1981, pp 502-507. On-line: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au>

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

Further reading

Malkin, John, *Andrew Fisher 1862-1928*, Walker & Connell, Strathclyde, c1979

McMullin, Ross, *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party 1891-1991*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991



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