

Sir William McMAHON, PC, CH, KCMG

Prime Minister 10 March 1971 to 5 December 1972



- William McMahon became the 20th prime minister in 1971 when elected leader of the parliamentary Liberal Party after the resignation of John Gorton.
- Member of the Liberal Party of Australia 1949-82.
- Member of House of Representatives for Lowe (NSW) 1950-82.

Minister for Navy and Minister for Air 1951-54, Social Services 1954-1956, Primary Industry 1956-58, Labour and National Service 1958-66, Treasurer 1966-69, Minister for External Affairs 1969-71.

- His period as Prime Minister ended on 5 December 1972, after the Liberal-Country Party coalition was defeated by Labor at the general election.

Main Achievements (1971-1972)

- His ministry was the first to have a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.
- Accelerated the withdrawal of combat troops from Vietnam, announcing on 18 August 1971 the return of the Australian Task Force by December.
- Announced program for granting self-government to the Australian territories of Papua New Guinea in April 1971.
- Initiated reform of the offshore mining legislation of the Gorton government and dealt with the demarcation issue over the continental shelf between Australia and Indonesia.

Personal life

- Born in Sydney, New South Wales, 23 February 1908. Died Sydney, 31 March 1988.
- Educated at Sydney Grammar School 1923-26, University of Sydney where he graduated with a law degree 1933 and economics degree 1949.
- In 1939 he enlisted in the army and rose to the rank of major. A hearing problem meant he was ineligible for overseas service.
- In June 1977 made a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG).
- Married Sonia Hopkins, Sydney, 11 December, 1965.

Life after politics

- Retired from parliament on 4 January 1982.
- Worked as a financial advisor to the Bank of America and BA Cash Management company.

Character

- *His slight form, tremulous voice and frequent verbal disasters led him to be seriously underrated. Nevertheless, he had extraordinary energy and persistence* (Source: *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, Volume 160, pp 1403-1407)

Did you know?

- His youngest child was born in 1971 during his period in office, making him only the third prime minister with a newborn baby during office.
- In 1967, Country Party leader, John McEwen vetoed McMahon as the Liberal's choice for prime minister.
- He was 63 years old when he became prime minister, the oldest after John McEwen.

Sources

Sekules, Peter, 'William McMahon' in Michelle Grattan (ed.), *Australian Prime Ministers*, New Holland, Sydney, 2000, pp 314-323.

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

Further reading

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Reid, Alan, *The Power Struggle*, Shakespeare Head Press, Sydney, 1969.



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