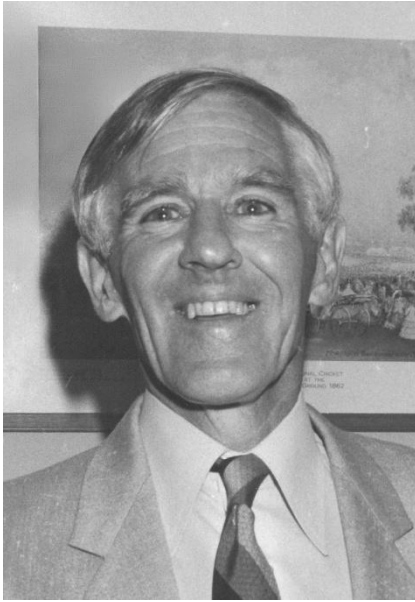




## Biography – The Honourable Anthony (Tony) Street (1926–2022)



Tony Street was a woolgrower whose 900-hectare family property named Eildon is near the town of Lismore in the Western District of Victoria, 160 km west of Melbourne. He led a full and active life, but of all his many considerable achievements he was most proud of his 70-year management of Eildon and its development as a prosperous and highly regarded Merino fine wool and prime lamb property.

Tony's father was Brigadier Geoffrey Street, a decorated World War I officer, and his mother's parents owned the neighbouring property Gala, 2,300 acres of which were separated off in 1919 to create Eildon. Tony was born in 1926 and spent his early years living at Eildon with his parents and younger sister. Brigadier Street entered Federal parliament in 1936 as the member for the seat of Corangamite and

quickly rose through the ranks to become a Cabinet minister in the Menzies wartime government but he was tragically killed in an aircraft accident just outside Canberra in 1940. This must have been a devastating blow for Tony, but his years of schooling at Melbourne Grammar School were notable for academic achievement, excellence on the cricket field and his appointment as School Captain in 1944. He enlisted in the navy in 1945 as an ordinary seaman in the final months of the Second World War, was demobbed in 1946 and returned to Eildon to run the property, aged 20.

The post-war years, especially the Korean war years in the early 1950s, were very prosperous ones for the country in general and for the wool industry in particular, and Eildon thrived. Tony married Ricky in 1951 in what was to become a 71-year union that produced three children, Geoffrey, Alan and Philip. During these years he was very active in sporting and other activities, especially as a leg-spin bowler for the Lismore Cricket Club (where he remains the club's greatest all-time wicket taker) and the Western Plains Country Week side. He also raced motor bikes (which ended when Ricky put her foot down!) and he obtained his private pilot's licence in 1963. He had a fine wine palate and was a strong supporter of the Australian wine industry.

In 1966, Tony followed in his father's footsteps and became the Liberal Party member for the Federal seat of Corangamite. His parliamentary career was a distinguished one. He held Corangamite comfortably in eight Federal elections and was very well known and respected in the electorate, which at the time stretched from suburban Geelong in the east to Peterborough in the west, and from Beaufort in the north to Cape Otway. He served as a cabinet minister in the Fraser government, initially as Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations then as Minister for Foreign Affairs. He approached issues in a calm, collaborative and respectful manner and aimed for consensus rather than confrontation, a style that served him and his country well in both portfolios. Despite being a very busy member of parliament, Tony still kept a close eye on Eildon, steering the property through challenges such as declining wool prices, two serious droughts in 1966-67 and 1981-82 and a grassfire in 1977 that burned over half the property and caused considerable stock losses. He retired from parliament in 1984.



In and out of parliament, Tony was always a passionate advocate for the wool industry, and agriculture more generally. Although he never attended university himself, he appreciated the fundamental role that education, research and innovation must play if Australia was to maintain its position as the world's leading wool producer. In particular, he recognised the challenges in translating the scientific and technological findings from research into practices and techniques that could be adopted by woolgrowers and other farmers. In his maiden parliamentary speech in 1967, he noted: "...a breakdown occurs between the results of successful scientific research being made public and the adoption of the new techniques by the man on the land." With great foresight, he spoke of three categories of farmers and their readiness to adopt new technologies: i) the innovators, ii) those who preferred to wait and see and iii) those who were unaware of technological advances and were extremely slow in adopting new or improved methods. The terms may have evolved since then (e.g. 'innovators' have now become 'early adopters') but the observations are familiar to us and still hold true more than 50 years later.

Tony practised what he preached. He made an area of the property available to the CSIRO for research for some years and was an early advocate of core testing at a time when traditionalists thought that the technology had little to offer. His long-term goal was for Eildon to become a fine wool producer, and over many years through careful breeding, water and pasture management and animal husbandry, the average fibre diameter fell from the mid-20 microns in the 1980s to 19 microns by the time Eildon was sold in 2020. Through these practices, as well as expanding the prime lamb side of the business, diversifying into cropping and for a short but profitable period, into Angus cattle, the property was able to adapt successfully to factors such as fluctuations in wool prices and an increasingly dry climate. Somewhat paradoxically, Tony was very uncomfortable with computers and never used a PC or owned a mobile phone in his life!

After retiring from politics, Tony moved with Ricky to the seaside town of Ocean Grove but he remained actively involved in the management of Eildon until well into his 90s. Despite the significant changes in the fortunes of the wool industry he saw over his lifetime, he never lost faith in the future of wool and his belief that this depended on continued investment in and commitment to research, innovation and advances in technology. He died in 2022, aged 96.