Item 3.2

Vale Bruce George Baird AM

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

It is with sadness that I inform Council of the death of former Liberal Minister, refugee advocate and tourism leader Bruce George Baird AM, on 2 October 2026 at the age of 84.

Bruce was elected to the New South Wales Parliament in 1984 after a career in business and trade. He began his working life as a Qantas executive trainee before serving as Assistant Trade Commissioner in Bonn (1972-1976), Trade Commissioner in New York (1977-1980), and Government Affairs Manager for Esso Australia (1980-1984).

As a Minister, he brought this experience not only to the Transport portfolio, but as Minister for Tourism and played a significant role in bringing the 2000 Olympics to Sydney. After Nick Greiner resigned as Premier in June 1992, Bruce was a candidate in the internal Liberal Party election for his successor. Bruce lost to John Fahey, resulting in his perhaps being the best Liberal Premier NSW never had.

Bruce retired from the NSW Parliament at the 1995 NSW election. In the 3 years that followed he served as managing director of the Tourism Council of Australia. In 1998, he was elected to the Federal Parliament as the Member for Cook, the electorate that covered the Sutherland Shire where he grew up. He retired from Parliament at the 2007 election. Despite his extensive Cabinet and other experience, he was never appointed a Minister by the then Prime Minister, John Howard. His most senior Parliamentary position was chairing the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration from 2004 to 2007.

This may have been because Bruce strived to serve God as well as Mammon. Before pursuing his extensive career in commerce, he had attempted to become an Anglican priest but failed the medical exam.

Despite this setback, he remained a lifelong Anglican committed to a pastoral Christianity, a commitment shared by his family. His wife, Judy, whom he married in 1964, dedicated her life to helping prisoners, refugees and people experiencing poverty. Their children continued that tradition of service: Steve led the anti-slavery organisation International Justice Mission Australia; Mike, former NSW Premier, became CEO of HammondCare; and Julia, a writer and journalist, helped found the Movement for the Ordination of Women in the Anglican Church and has written extensively on religion and social issues.

Bruce’s own work as a Federal MP reflected these values. He chaired the parliamentary group Amnesty International from 2000 and, along with fellow Liberal MPs Petro Georgiou, Russell Broadbent and Judi Moylan, opposed mandatory detention of asylum seekers. In June 2005, the 4 MPs negotiated with Prime Minister John Howard over proposals to change the detention system. The resulting agreement provided for families with children to move into community accommodation and for the Commonwealth Ombudsman to review cases of detention exceeding two years, while retaining mandatory detention. Georgiou, Broadbent and Moylan, like Bruce, never became Howard Government Ministers.

After leaving Federal Parliament, Bruce served as Chair of the Tourism and Transport Forum and of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council. He subsequently became a patron of the Asylum Seekers Centre and served on the boards of the National Apology Foundation, the Heart Research Institute, the Sydney Opera House and Screen Producers Australia, among others and as Chair of Business Events Sydney.

Recognition of Bruce's integrity and compassion has been a focus of the many tributes following his death. I want to add the role Bruce played in saving and repurposing Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf.

Built between 1910 and 1915, the Finger Wharf was major infrastructure serving Sydney's working harbour until the 1970s. Despite its significance, both the Unsworth Labor Government and, later, the Greiner Coalition had policies to demolish it.

I opposed the demolition of the Finger Wharf and worked with Friends of the Finger Wharf, Jack Mundey and the unions, Milo Dunphy of the Nature Conservation Council, architects and heritage experts to stop the demolition of such an important and heroic heritage structure.

After the 1991 NSW state election, Independents John Hatton, Peter McDonald and I negotiated an agreement with the Government that involved a Charter of Reform that included reforms such as 4-year fixed terms of Parliament, whistleblower legislation, and others that increased transparency and accountability.

Following the signing of the agreement, Minister Baird met with me and agreed to overturn the government's policy of demolishing the Finger Wharf. Instead, he agreed to its restoration and repurposing.

Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf now accommodates a hotel, restaurants, bars and residential apartments with public access along the wharf, ensuring this historic structure remains a vibrant and valued part of Sydney Harbour.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) all persons attending this meeting of Council observe one minute's silence to commemorate the life of Bruce George Baird and his significant contribution to the public life of New South Wales and Australia as a NSW Government Minister, Member of Federal Parliament, refugee and asylum seeker advocate and tourism leader

(B) Council express its condolences to Bruce's children, Julia, Mike and Steve

(C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to Bruce's family to convey Council's condolences.

THE RT. HON. CLOVER MOORE AO HON. FRAIA

Lord Mayor of Sydney