

Former WA Nats leader on birthday honours list

CAIN ANDREWS

Former Nationals leader Brendon Grylls has been recognised in the King's Birthday 2026 Honours List, receiving one of Australia's highest awards in acknowledgement of a political legacy he says still sees strangers stop him in the street.

Mr Grylls, who served as Nationals WA leader and championed the controversial Royalties for Regions program through multiple terms in Parliament, said the Member of the Order of Australia honour belonged to the team around him as much as to himself.

"It's had a long-running influence. I still get people across the street every day to talk to me about it, and say thank you, and so this recognition is probably for all of that team that put that together and helped create that unique moment in history," he said.

The Royalties for Regions scheme which redirected a portion of mining royalties into regional WA communities was fiercely debated when the National Party under Mr Grylls launched the policy in 2008 before it was enshrined in law the following year.

Although critics were vocal at the time, Mr Grylls said the passage of time had settled the argument.

"I'm very proud of it," he said.

"It was highly contested at the time.

"Plenty of my political opponents and others had strong opinions on it.

"I walk down the street of anywhere in regional Western Australia today, someone would stop me and say thank you."

The recognition comes 17 years after the program's introduction, yet Mr Grylls says its impact continues to attract attention well beyond WA's borders.

"I get stopped in Perth a lot as well, people remember," he said.

"Just this week, someone from the Eastern States actually said to me that it's quite remarkable how prosperous your little country communities look.

"The legacy is still being talked



Brendon Grylls has been named on the King's Birthday Honours List. Picture: Michael Wilson

about some 17 years on." Today Mr Grylls said the future looked bright for the Pilbara, describing the region as the most powerful economic engine in the country.

"The region is the strongest economic driver in Australia, without a doubt. Mining continues to go from strength to strength and it's helped us weather difficult economic storms," he said.

The former politician said he was most excited by the potential to have something take up space on his wall next to all of his wife's achievements.

"My wife is incredibly smart and talented, and she's got a wall full of degrees. I actually never finished my degree, so the only thing I've got on the wall is a fork-lift ticket," he said.

"I'm most excited about this award, because I reckon that finally I get something to put on the wall next to the 10 pieces of paper."

The honour was announced as part of the 2026 King's Birthday Honours List, with Governor-General Sam Mostyn congratulating all recipients.

"Our honours system recognises outstanding people who contribute so much to Australia. In our communities, in workplaces and across the country, recipients have made an exceptional contribution to Australia," she said.

"The work of our award recipients, and the contributions of the thousands of Australians who have been nominated and recognised throughout the history of our honours system, is something we can take great pride in celebrating."

State's health investment questioned amid outbreak

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Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia chair Vicki O'Donnell has blamed the ongoing diphtheria outbreak across the Kimberley and Pilbara on the State Government's lack of long-term environmental health investment.

The potentially fatal disease had not been seen in regional WA for more than half a century until earlier this year.

The outbreak is disproportionately affecting Aboriginal people, with more than 94 per cent of cases this year occurring among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

While vaccination remains a critical tool, Ms O'Donnell said addressing the underlying structural drivers of ill health would stop the disease's spread.

"We need parity in community infrastructure, essential services and living conditions including housing, water, sewerage and waste management," she said.

The AHCWA said the outbreak was being driven by crowded conditions and limited access to showers, clean clothes and bedding.

"The solution to curbing the current spread and preventing future outbreaks lies in the Aboriginal Environmental Health Model of Care," they said.

"Functioning showers, laundry facilities, and wastewater removal systems."

Ms O'Donnell said existing skin infections — often caused by group A streptococcus — are already primary drivers of Acute Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease.

"It is unacceptable that our people continue to suffer from ARF and RHD, diseases that are entirely preventable through improved living conditions", she said.

Two-thirds of these cases present as cutaneous diphtheria, where bacteria spread through direct contact with infected wounds and sores. The WA Country Health Service, the Department of Housing and Works, the Department of Communities, Health Prevention Minister Sabine Winton, Health Minister Meridith Hammat and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Don Punch were contacted for comment.



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