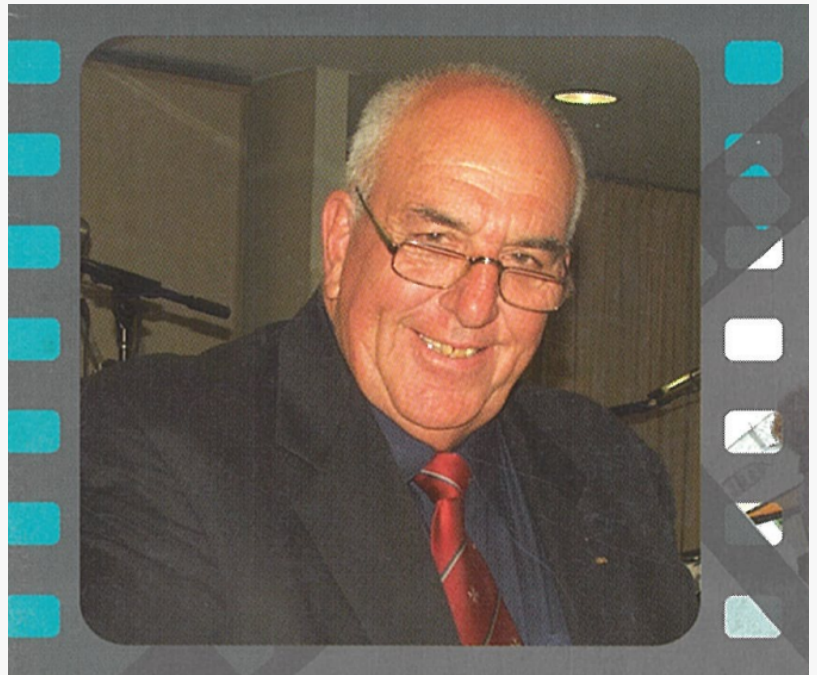


Australian Olive Association founding President Les Parsons OAM honoured

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INVERELL, AUSTRALIA, August 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- His passing has renewed focus on the grassroots origins of Australia's national olive organisation and the growers who created it before its formal establishment in 1996.

The Australian olive industry is mourning Leslie "Les" Parsons OAM, inaugural President of the Australian Olive Association and a founding leader of Australia's modern olive industry.



Les Parsons

Les passed away in hospital on 3 August 2026.

His death has prompted a closer examination of the Association's origins and the largely voluntary movement that united regional growers before Australia had an established national olive industry.

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'They said we wouldn't make it, but here we are.' - headline to article titled 'Ten years of the AOA', The Olive Press Magazine 2005"

Les Parsons

"To describe Les simply as a former President understates what he did," said Amanda Bailey, author of a newly published historical tribute.

"There was no established national olive industry waiting for him to lead. Les and his fellow founders had to create its constitution, connect the regions, build technical

capability and persuade growers to work together."

The movement began in 1994, when regional olive associations formed at Inverell, Moree and

Kingaroy. In April that year, approximately 160 people attended the Olives and Carobs for Landcare and for Profit symposium at Adelaide University's Roseworthy Campus, while another 100 were reportedly turned away.

A focus group at the symposium identified the industry's immediate need: "We need to form an olive industry group to network information."

Seven people - Farnell Hobman, Luigi Bazanni, Les Parsons, Michael Burr, Mac McCulloch, Ray Archer and Margi Kirkby - formed the committee that drafted the first Australian Olive Association constitution.

On 13 May 1995, approximately 100 people gathered at Mildura's Grand Hotel to consider the proposed constitution. It was adopted, 65 people joined the Association and Les was elected President.

The Australian Olive Association was formally established as the national peak body on 21 February 1996. However, by then it already had a constitution, members, elected leaders and a national publication, The Olive Press.

"If the story begins only with the formal date in 1996, the people who conceived the Association and did the work required to create it risk disappearing from its history," Mrs Bailey said.

"Les must be remembered not merely as someone who held the presidency, but as one of the people who built the organisation itself."

During Les's presidency, the Association developed from a small grassroots movement into a national network. It introduced technical workshops, established research priorities, adopted its first five-year Strategic Plan and supported the creation of Australia's pioneering olive oil sensory panel.

That panel obtained International Olive Oil Council authorisation to assess olive oil according to international standards, helping establish the technical foundations of Australia's reputation for high-quality extra virgin olive oil.

Les summarised the cooperative principle behind the early Association at Wagga Wagga in 1997: "We must all pull together if the industry is to get up and go."

His national leadership was grounded in practical production. As a Director of Gwydir Olives Pty Ltd, Les helped establish New South Wales' first full-scale olive oil processing plant at Inverell in 1998.

With his wife Heather, he also developed Olives of Beaulieu, a family grove, olive oil business and cellar door near Inverell. Their extra virgin olive oil received a Silver Medal at the 2004 Australian

Olive Oil Awards.

Les's service extended well beyond olives. He served as an Inverell Shire councillor and contributed to regional development, tourism, the Inverell Bushfire Brigade, Inverell Pioneer Village and the Inverell Macintyre Lions Club.

In the 2021 Australia Day Honours, Les received the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the Inverell community and local government.

"Les and his fellow founders did not inherit a national olive industry - they built one," Mrs Bailey said.

"Honouring Les means preserving the full story of what he helped create, recognising the people who built it beside him and ensuring their contribution is not reduced to a footnote."

The full tribute, historical timeline and photographs are available at:

<https://theolivecentre.com/knowledge/vale-les-parsons-oam-pioneer-of-australian-olives>

The funeral service honouring Leslie "Les" Parsons OAM will be held at 2.00 pm on Friday, 21 August 2026, at the Anglican Church, River Street, Inverell. It will be followed by a graveside interment and a wake at the Inverell Club.

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