

Bruce Priestley Simpson

4 April 1957 – 13 February 2024

Like many country folk who have spent their working lives on the land, Bruce Simpson was physically a large man. Much more significant, however, was his largeness of soul. He generously and cheerfully radiated calm, utter dependability, and constructive common sense in the communities to which he so actively belonged: his family and many institutions of the Southern Riverina. Bruce died from a freak natural accident on his farm on February 13, 2024.

Simpson was born into an urban family in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, the son of Meg and Ron Simpson. Educated at Scotch College, he immediately gravitated while at school to fellow students who came from the country. Higher education in Melbourne universities held no sway for him: off he went to the Riverina and worked first on farms; and then, after gaining a degree in Agricultural Science in Wagga, he held positions as crop manager in some of the tougher reaches of the southern Riverina, most notably as Irrigation Manager and Director in F. S. Falkiner & Sons Pty. Ltd.

The decisive moment in his personal life was his marriage to Shandra Powell in 1988. Shandra and Bruce were devoted parents to Charlie and Lucy. The decisive moment in his professional career was a move into Deniliquin in 2000, where Simpson joined a farm consulting business (Peppin Planners), of which he later became a partner and owner. He and his wife also purchased a mixed irrigation property ('Coolowie') outside Deniliquin, and later three adjoining properties, which he ran for the following 23 years.

All these demanding commitments, so energetically pursued, might occupy most lives. Simpson's deep reservoir of good, even-handed judgment, however, attracted attention in Deniliquin and the institutions of the southern Riverina. He stepped up to become Chair of Murray River Irrigation Ltd., and also of the Murray Group of Concerned Communities. These positions involved, mostly directly, management of water. Needless to say, water was and remains the vital and fiercely contested resource for farming communities, especially so across the extended drought of 1997 to 2009, which struck southern New South Wales and Victoria especially hard. Simpson managed these hotly contested issues with cool steadiness and fair-minded equity. In 2013, after the drought had broken, Simpson was recognized as Citizen of the Year by Conargo Shire.

Water was not the only crucial area in which Simpson made guiding contributions: he was the inaugural Chair of the Country Education Foundation, Edward River Region; and more recently he became Chair of a committee to establish a country university,

serving the youth of the Riverina. He was also on the Board of Intereach, a non-profit community organization committed to developing community infrastructure to support rural and regional and remote communities.

In her parliamentary eulogy to him on 28 February, 2024, The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, The Hon. Sussan Ley, concluded her eloquent praise of Bruce Simpson with just the right colloquial phrase. After listing his many community contributions, she went to the heart of the matter: 'more importantly, he was a good bloke'. Bruce Simpson was a very good bloke indeed, an ever-cheerful, magnanimous, wise and kind giver who commanded deep respect from all to whom he gave. He is survived by his wife Shandra, his children Charlie and Lucy, and the many members of his extended family, including sister Julie and brothers James and (twin) John.

James Simpson

John Simpson

17 March 2024