Despite its small population and remoteness, Australia has won international recognition for distinguished contributions in many fields - politics, literature, the arts, sport, business, law and science. Choosing 75 names, one for each year of Qantas' history, was a challenging, sometimes invidious task.

The selection is highly personal. I am notoriously remote from sport and popular music and I have also had to guard against political prejudice. Some major figures who lived in the Qantas years, such as Nellie Melba, Daniel Mannix, Billy Hughes, Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson, Mary Gilmore and Arthur Streeton were excluded because their major impact was before 1920.

Women have had great difficulty in breaking through the professional 'glass ceiling', except in the arts, literature, nursing and medicine. No woman served in a State Parliament until 1921 (Edith Cowan in Western Australia), Federal Parliament until 1943 (Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney), as a Supreme Court judge until 1965 (Roma Mitchell in South Australia), as President of the Australian Academy of Science until 1970 (Dorothy Hill), as a State Premier until 1990 (Carmen Lawrence in Western Australia) or as a High Court judge until 1991 (Mary Gaudron).

Aboriginal achievement in Australia has been unrecognised or undervalued, partly because of an assumption of 'white supremacy', also because numbers were low and access to education almost non-existent.

From European settlement in 1788, Australia was dominated by settlers from the British Isles until Arthur Calwell's mass migration scheme in 1947 set the foundations for 'multicultural' Australia.

Some on the list made their greatest achievements as expatriates; Howard Florey being the outstanding example.

In December 1990, The Australian Magazine invited a panel of 14 gurus to nominate the 20 greatest Australians of the 20th century. Dr H.C. "Nugget" Coombs was the most frequent choice, followed by Howard Florey, Robert Menzies, Macfarlane Burnet, Patrick White and Essington Lewis.

Here are my 75 distinguished Australians:
Ben Chifley (1885-1951). Ex-engine driver. Australia's Treasurer 1941-49 and Prime Minister 1945-49. He worked loyally with Curtin. With 'Nugget' Coombs and others he created the model for post-war reconstruction.

Stanley Melbourne Bruce (1883-1967). Prime Minister 1923-29. Spent only 34 years of his long life in Australia. With his deputy, Earle Page, he created many important Australian institutions, including the CSIRO and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Established Canberra as the national capital.


Rupert Murdoch (1931-). Son of Sir Keith Murdoch who ran The Herald and Weekly Times. Turned News Corporation into one of the world's major media owners, but became a US citizen in 1985.

Hudson Fysh (1895-1974). Became manager of Qantas in 1923, retiring as chairman in 1966. An aviator, like Charles Kingsford Smith and Reg Ansett, until 1930. He was a visionary and internationalist.

Kerry Packer (1937-). Inherited Consolidated Press from Sir Frank Packer and expanded a media empire that includes television, magazines, and a minority shareholding in newspapers.

Dr H. C. 'Nugget' Coombs (1906- ). Born in Western Australia. Banker, economist and public servant. Played a decisive role in shaping policy and community attitudes in banking, higher education, the arts and Aboriginal affairs.

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Malcolm Fraser (1930- ). Oxford-educated, then a grazier. Liberal MP 1955-83. Kerr sacked Whitlam in 1975; Fraser was appointed Prime Minister, won three elections, then lost to Hawke. He was a radical on some issues, opposing racism and supporting a republic.

Bob Hawke (1929- ). Enjoyed extraordinary popularity as President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (1970-80), led Labor to four election wins, and was Prime Minister 1983-91. His Memoirs (1994) were controversial.

Paul John Keating (1944- ). Left school early. Became a Federal MP at 25, was Treasurer 1983-91, displacing Hawke as Prime Minister in 1991. He is a brilliant Parliamentary performer of the take-no-prisoners school. He transformed the Australian economy and has fought to entrench native title.

Neville Wran (1926- ). Successful Sydney QC, Premier of New South Wales 1976-86. Chaired CSIRO 1986-91 and became a merchant banker. He was a masterly strategist.


Gough Whitlam (1916- ). Patrician in style, led Labor (1967-77), ending 23 years in Opposition to become Prime Minister 1972-75. His dismissal by Sir John Kerr (November 1975) remains deeply controversial. His reforms in foreign policy, education, the arts, Australian honors, law reform have mostly survived and he is now a national icon.

Michael Kirby (1939– ). A judge since 1975, President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal since 1984. Has an almost intimidating intellectual range, including criminology, information theory, AIDS, transborder data flows, human rights, literacy and music.


Carmen Mary Lawrence (1948– ). A clinical psychologist; she became a Labor MLA in Western Australia in 1986 and was Australia’s first woman Premier 1990–93. She then transferred to the Commonwealth Parliament as Minister for Human Services and Health.


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She is a tireless campaigner for human rights and the status of women.

Mary Genevieve Gaudron (1943- ). Won a Gold Medal in Law at Sydney University, was New South Wales Solicitor General 1987-91, and in 1991 became the first woman Justice of the High Court.

Judith Arundell Wright (1915- ). Poet. She wrote her family history, edited anthologies, published criticism and campaigned for conserving the environment. Her 12 volumes of poetry "probe universal human questions."


Kenneth Baillieu Myer (1921-1992). Born in San Francisco, the son of Sidney Myer who founded the Melbourne retail giant. A farsighted philanthropist who was Whitlam's original choice for Governor-General in 1974. He established the Myer Foundation, chaired the Howard Florey Institute, Victorian Arts Centre and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.


Essington Lewis (1881-1961). Industrialist. He became a mining engineer, joined BHP in 1904, became general manager in 1921, retiring in 1950. Directed Australian munitions production and aircraft production during World War II. He was made a Companion of Honor in 1943.


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Patrick White (1912-1990). Born in London, was educated in England, served in the RAF, returning in 1947. The Tree of Man (1953), Voss (1957) and The Eye of the Storm (1973) were hailed as masterpieces. He received the 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature for his "epic psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature."

Peter Singer (1946- ). Philosopher. Was professor at Monash University from 1977, gaining international recognition for his works on bioethics. His Animal Liberation (1975) raised novel ethical issues about exploiting and inflicting pain on animals.

Goonerre Noonuccal (Kath Walker, nee Roska) (1920-1993). Poet and Aboriginal rights worker, born on Stradbroke Island. Self-educated, she worked as telephonist and secretary, publishing her first volume of poems We Are Going in 1964. She won a Fulbright Scholarship to the US 1978-79 and in 1980 resumed her tribal name.

Germaine Greer (1939- ). Born in Melbourne, educated at Melbourne, Sydney and Cambridge universities. Her The Female Eunuch (1970) ranks as one of the basic texts of the feminist revolution.

Manning Clark (1915-1991). Historian. Like Sir Keith Hancock, played a vital role in encouraging Australia's history as a research and teaching discipline. His six-volume A History Of Australia (1962-87) generated passionate debate.

Barry Humphries (1934- ). Writer and actor, born in Melbourne. He created a series of powerful, savagely satirical stereotypes, reflecting aspects of Australia society. (Alan Bennett is a gentler English equivalent.)

Donald Horne (1921- ). Journalist, editor and academic. Wrote The Lucky Country (1964) and 20 other books. He argued that "lucky" elements in our history contributed to a lack of intellectual nerve. He chaired the Australia Council 1985-90.


Bruce Beresford (1940-). Film writer and director. His Australian films include *The Adventures Of Barry McKenzie* (1971), *The Getting Of Wisdom* (1977), and *Breaker Morant* (1979), while international credits include *Black Robe* (1990) and *Driving Miss Daisy* (1990).

Sidney Nolan (1917-1992). Painter and myth maker, born in Melbourne. He painted about 35,000 works (even more than Picasso) and the quality was variable. At his best, he was astonishingly evocative, notably with his *Ned Kelly* and *Gallipoli* paintings. He received the Order of Merit in 1983.

Fred Williams (1927-1982). Painter and graphic artist. He evolved a spare, almost calligraphic, style which captured the strangeness and isolation of the Australian landscape.


Howard Florey (1898-1968). Born in Adelaide, and a professor at Oxford. He was the principal developer of penicillin, receiving the Nobel Prize and Copley Medal Presidency of the Royal Society, Order of Merit and a peerage.

Arthur Boyd (1920-). Painter and ceramic artist, born in Melbourne. He developed an individual style with his landscape and figurative works, many with literary, biblical or mythological themes. He gave a magnificent estate at Bundanon to the nation.
Ian Clunies Ross (1899-1959). A dynamic veterinary scientist, Chairman of CSIRO 1949-59, was an effective publicist and lobbyist who died prematurely. (Florey and Clunies Ross appear on our $A50 note.


Jean MacNamara (1899-1968). An outstanding pioneer of research into poliomyelitis and also in the use of myxomatosis to combat the rabbit plague.

Gus Nossal (1931-). Immunologist, born in Austria. He succeeded Burnet at the Hall Institute, led Australia’s most gifted team, including Jacques Miller and Don Metcalfe. A charismatic public spokesman on science and President of the Australian Academy of Science from 1994.

Adrienne Clarke (1938-). Professor of Biology at Melbourne. Became Chair of CSIRO in 1991 and was an effective advocate for science, and promoting career opportunities for women.

Frank Fenner (1914-). Worked with Burnet and won the Copley Medal (1995) for his international leadership of the campaign to eradicate smallpox.

Mark Oliphant (1901-). Studied with Ernest Rutherford, worked on the development of the atomic bomb (which he later campaigned against), was first President of the Australian Academy of Science 1954-57 and Governor of South Australia, his home state, 1971-76.
John Eccles (1903- ). Physiologist, born in Melbourne, educated at Melbourne High and Melbourne University. He worked in New Zealand and the US, then retired to Switzerland. He won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1963 for his work on the chemical transmission of signals in the nervous system.

Peter Sculthorpe (1929- ). Composer. Encouraged by the conductor Bernard Heisre (1894-1982) and the ABC, he was, apart from the expatriate Percy Grainger, the most performed Australian composer. His works include 11 string quartets, an opera, film scores and Sun Music IV.

Jim Peacock (1937- ). Plant geneticist with CSIRO. Was a protege of Sir Otto Frankel (1900- ), and a leader in biotechnological research. "Gene shears" was developed in his Division of Plant Industry.

Charles Mackerras (1925- ). Conductor. An oboist in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra who, encouraged by Eugene Goossens, gained an international reputation as a conductor in Britain, the US, Germany and Czechoslovakia. He revived the operas of Leos Janacek, winning many awards for his recordings.


Don Bradman (1908- ). Cricketer, born in Bowral. Regarded as Australia's most brilliant and consistent batsman, his record score of 452 runs not out (1930) stood for more than 50 years until Brian Lara scored 501 (1994). He was Australia's Test captain between 1936-49, receiving a knighthood in 1949 and an AC in 1979.


Hubert Opperman (1904- ). Cyclist and politician, born in Victoria. "Oppy" was Australian cycling's road champion from 1924 and won international competitions in 1928 and 1931. He was a Liberal MP 1949-57, a Minister, High Commissioner to Malta and a knight.

John Monash (1865-1931). Soldier and administrator; led Australian troops at Gallipoli and in the Western Front. After 1920 he resumed practice as an engineer, chaired the Victorian State Electricity Commission 1921-31, and was Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University 1923-31. Monash University was named in his honor (1959).

Thomas Albert Btamey (1884-1951). Australia’s only field marshal. A schoolteacher from Wagga, he worked with Monash in World War I and had a dodgy reputation as Victoria’s police chief 1925-36. His fellow generals disliked him but he had a powerful mind, and, as Commander-in-Chief of Allied Military Forces in the South West Pacific 1942-45, worked closely with Curtin and MacArthur.

Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop (1907-1993). Surgeon. He acquired heroic status for his leadership of Australian prisoners of war held by the Japanese in Java and the Thailand-Burma railway. His War Diaries (1985) were memorable. He was knighted (1969) and received an AC (1987).

Harry Seidler (1923-). Architect. Born in Vienna, trained in Canada and Brazil, worked in Sydney from 1949. He brought the Bauhaus tradition to Australia. His buildings include the Australian Embassy, Paris.

John Andrews (1933-). Studied at Harvard, worked in Toronto, returning to Sydney in 1972. His CN Tower in Toronto is Canada’s tallest structure. He designed many institutional and university buildings in the US, Canada and Australia and was an advocate for better design standards.


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