Alfred Deakin

Prime Minister of Australia 1903–04, 1905–08 and 1909–10

Edmund Three times Prime Minister in a politically volatile decade, Alfred Deakin commenced his first term in September 1903, leading the Protectionist government after Edmund Barton's appointment to the High Court of Australia. Deakin had served previously as Attorney-General in Barton's inaugural government. He had a notable background in law, journalism and Victorian politics, where he had played a prominent role in the federation of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Deakin served as Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs from 24 September 1903 to 27 April 1904 and from 5 July 1905 to 13 November 1908. He was again Prime Minister – this time leading a Fusion government that comprised the non-Labor parties – from 2 June 1909 to 29 April 1910.

Deakin's government was instrumental in establishing and strengthening the essential machinery of state. His second term (1905–08) was his most significant, earning him the title 'the constructor' as his government dealt with issues including the public service, defence policy and military infrastructure, external affairs, federal financial relations and the High Court. Other important measures included the transfer of the Northern Territory from South Australia to the Commonwealth, establishing Canberra as the federal capital site and amendments to the Judiciary Act and the Immigration Restriction Act. Deakin's second term, like his first, depended upon Labor Party support, and his government was defeated when disagreements over legislation prompted Labor to withdraw from the alliance.

Deakin remained Leader of the Opposition (and of the Liberal Party he founded in 1909) until ill health forced his resignation in January 1913. He participated little in public life after his retirement, though he did chair the 1914 Royal Commission on Food Supplies and on Trade and Industry During the War and was the Commonwealth's official representative at the Panama exhibition in 1915.

Alfred Deakin died in Melbourne on 7 October 1919, and was given a state funeral.

Research guide – Our First Six: Guide to the Archives of Australia's Prime Ministers

National Archives holdings relating to Alfred Deakin

The National Archives holds records relating to Alfred Deakin both as a Federation figure and a member of the Commonwealth parliament.

In the table below, reference numbers direct you to the item or series in RecordSearch, the National Archives database. There you can find more information. In many cases you can view entire digitised records. The information will appear in a new browser window.

Collection references

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Records of the Australasian Federal Convention of 1897–98	1888–98	R216
Transfer of the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth	1901–11	A452, 1954/621
Summary of work done in the Attorney-General's Department during A Deakin's term as Attorney-General	1902–03	A432, 1929/2611
Letter book (with index for personal letters sent) of the Prime Minister's Office	1902–06	A28
Postcard of A Deakin with a background of Australian and British flags	1903	A1719, 3592C
High Court Procedure Act	1903–04	A1, 1904/1772
Correspondence of the Governor-General about the fall of the A Deakin government and formation of the J C Watson government	1904	A6662, 237
Papers relating to the federal capital site – correspondence between A Deakin and the NSW Premier	1905	A18, 5
Correspondence of and historical note on the fifth Commonwealth ministry (A Deakin)	1905–08	A5447, 9 part 2
Speech by A Deakin on defence policy	1907	A5954, 1347/11
Correspondence of the Governor-General about A Deakin's resignation and A Fisher's assumption of the office of Prime Minister	1908–09	A6662, 1292
Canberra as the federal capital site	1908	A2, 1908/3855
Industrial-related correspondence of the Prime Minister's Office	1909	A60
Deakin's Cabinet notebooks (microfilm)	1910	A6562
Royal Commission on food supplies and on trade and industry during the war	1914–15	A3832, RC13 item 1
Royal Commission on food supplies and on trade and industry during the war	1914–15	A3832, RC13 item 2
Royal Commission on food supplies and on trade and industry during the war	1914–15	A3832, RC13 item 3
Royal Commission on food supplies and on trade and industry during the war	1914–15	A3832, RC13 item 4
Royal Commission on food supplies and on trade and industry during the war	1914–15	A3832, RC13 item 5

Royal Commission on food supplies and on trade and industry during the war	1914–15	A3832, RC13 item 6
Royal Commission on food supplies and on trade and industry during the war	1914–15	A3832, RC13 item 7
Deakin as Commonwealth representative at the Panama exhibition	1915	A6006, 1915/12/31