

## John Christian Watson

### **Prime Minister of Australia April–August 1904**

John Christian (Chris) Watson was born at Valparaiso, Chile in 1867, but spent most of his childhood in New Zealand. He migrated to Australia in 1886 and found work in Sydney as a newspaper compositor. Watson became active in the Typographical Association of New South Wales and the New South Wales Trades and Labor Council, becoming Council President in 1892. During the 1890s he was prominent in the formation of the Labor Party in New South Wales and represented the party in the Legislative Assembly as member for Young (1894–1901).

Watson was elected to the new Commonwealth parliament in 1901 as Member for the New South Wales seat of Bland, and held this seat until becoming Member for South Sydney in 1906. He was leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party from May 1901 to October 1907, during which time Labor, while sitting on the cross benches between Alfred Deakin's Protectionist government and the Free Trade opposition, regularly held the balance of power.

Unable to secure Labor support for its Conciliation and Arbitration Bill, Deakin's government fell in April 1904. Watson was commissioned to form a government – the first national labour government in the world – in which he served as Prime Minister and Treasurer. Lacking reliable alliances with either the Protectionists or Free Traders, Watson's government was short-lived. When Labor introduced an amended Conciliation and Arbitration Bill in August 1904 it was also defeated in parliament. Watson resigned and was replaced as Prime Minister by George Reid, leading a conservative Free Trade–Protectionist coalition.

Watson was replaced as Labor Party leader by Andrew Fisher in 1907, and although he remained in parliament until 1910, he was not given a ministry in Fisher's government of 1908–09.

Out of parliament, Watson ended his association with the Labor Party in 1916 over the question of conscription. He became active in business and from 1920 until his death in 1941 was president of the National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA).

Research guide – [Our First Six: Guide to the Archives of Australia's Prime Ministers](#)

## National Archives holdings relating to Chris Watson

The National Archives holds a range of records relating to Chris Watson's years in parliament, including his short term as Prime Minister.

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
<u>Letter from John Watson MP and associated correspondence about enforcing of minimum wage for workmen employed in connection with contracts for saddlery for military contingents</u>	1902	A6443, 610
<u>Watson ministry (27 Apr – 17 August 1904) – oaths and correspondence relating to appointments and resignations</u>	1904	A5447, 5
<u>– oaths and correspondence relating to appointments and resignations</u>	1904	A5447, 6
<u>Request by the Prime Minister, Mr John Christian Watson, for a dissolution of the Commonwealth Parliament on the defeat of his Ministry</u>	1904	A6661, 1079
<u>Request by the Prime Minister, Mr John Christian Watson, to see the Governor-General in Melbourne</u>	1904	A6661, 1151
<u>Governor General's Office – correspondence – concerning the fall of the Deakin Government and forming of the Watson (Labour) Government</u>	1904	A6662, 237
<u>Photostat copy of secret despatch from Governor-General to Secretary of State for the Colonies about Watson's government</u>	1904	CP201/1, 1
<u>Historic Memorials – portrait of Mr JC Watson</u>	1913–15	CP103/11, 306
<u>Hon. JC Watson – appointment as Honorary Organiser in regard to scheme to provide employment for returned soldiers – also appointment of Mr DJ Quinn as secretary</u>	1915–17	A2, 1916/3631
<u>Suggestions by John Christian Watson, Honorary Organiser, federal parliamentary War Committee, regarding a proposed scheme in the Rutherglen area to raise funds for the benefit of returned soldiers</u>	1916–17	A2479, 17/1410
<u>Watson, JC about Aungur Limb (artificial limbs for returned soldiers)</u>	1917	A2479, 17/507
<u>Decision to invite Mrs JC Watson (Mrs Antonia Watson), wife of former Prime Minister John Christian Watson, to the opening of parliament at Canberra</u>	1926	A6680, DY16/3
<u>Condolences – Watson, The Hon John Christian</u>	1941–42	A461, 700/1/452
<u>JC Watson, ex Prime Minister, biographical notes</u>	1957	A463, 1957/1995