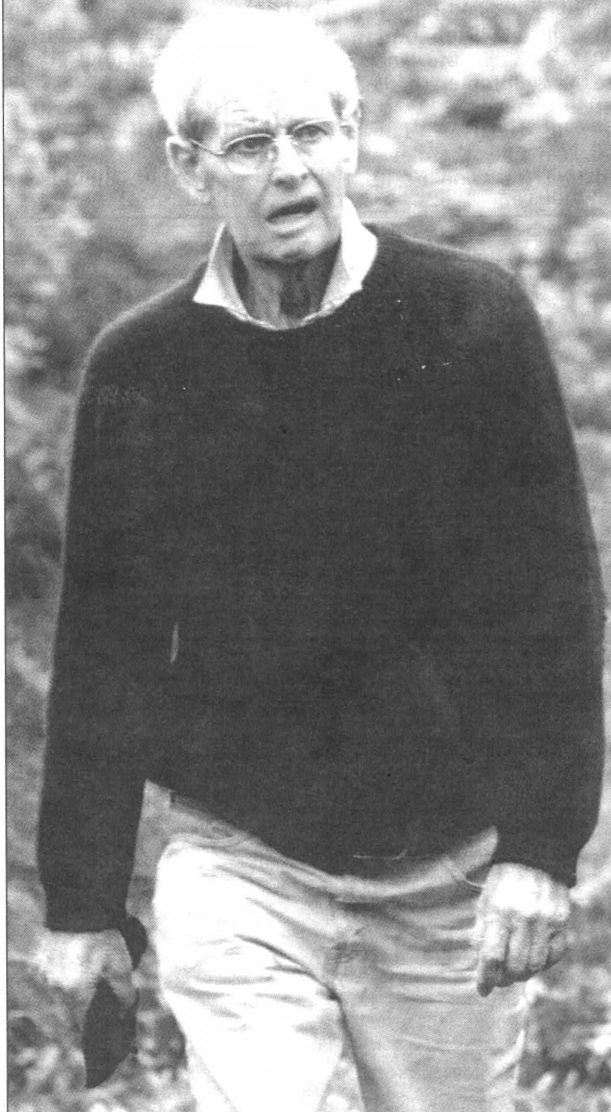


Tough man such an inspiration



IAN SMITH

FEW people in life leave an impression like former state opposition leader and senior Liberal minister Dale Baker, who died on Tuesday aged 73.

He was funny, naughty, charming, commercial, insightful and tough.

That toughness was most evident as he battled motor neurone disease. To those who saw him deteriorate since he was diagnosed with the shocking disease in 2009, he was an inspiration.

However, his attitude was no surprise to those who knew him. Putting a successful business career on hold, which saw him recognised across the winery, cattle and horticultural industries, he gave the Liberal Party a spine.

His forensic dislocation of the State Bank collapse showed the benefits of a business brain correctly applied to a political matter.

He did not suffer fools. He became more focused when senior executives and board members of the State Bank told him there was nothing to be worried about, saying "back off" or else the Liberals would face the wrath of the business community. He cham-

pioned the free market and urged the party to adopt a privatisation platform to put the state back in the black.

In a recent letter applauding Dale's contribution to the Liberal Party, John Howard noted this was perhaps his greatest contribution.

While proudly a "Conservative" he was also progressive.

He was an advocate of medical research, particularly on stem cells. He had the respect of Labor politicians and maintained good relationships with many despite his condemnation of many ALP policies.

Shaped by a lean to the political Right, Dale became at odds with a handful of Liberals. It would have been a different South Australia had Dale led the Liberals in the 1993 election.

This tough man should be missed by South Australia.

Sure, he never became premier – but what he did contribute to a state he loved was significant.

Dale leaves a wonderful family, including four grandchildren. His resolute wife Margaret, daughter Marina and son Tom were with him when he died.

Ian Smith was press secretary to Dale Baker as Opposition Leader and a close friend

