Speech

Address By

Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

On the occasion of

Opening address for the International Symposium on Sustainable Ironmaking
Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology, University of New South Wales
29 July 2010

Ladies and gentlemen, I am really delighted to join you here this morning for the opening session of this important symposium, and I extend a very warm welcome to our overseas visitors.

Despite the relative ease of travel and communications these days, leaving our offices and laboratories and homes for extended periods remains a balancing act for men and women.

However, the rewards of coming together with colleagues from across the nation and world are too compelling:

- the power and potential of collaboration
- and the enduring value of collegialism.

One of the privileges of my role is the opportunity:

- to see first hand the extraordinary depth and diversity of talent and skill in this country
- to learn about how they’re being used
- used intelligently and resourcefully to achieve better outcomes for the Australian economy, environment and society
- and to observe how our people – our experts, innovators and entrepreneurs – all of you here
- how you work in an international context
- your formal partnerships, and the spirit of generosity and cooperation you bring to your daily exchanges with one another.

Friends, I talk often about the respect and awe with which I regard:

- scientists, and their contribution to research and development,
- their discipline and curiosity, and persistence through doubt and setback;

I love listening to them talk about their work,

- they do so with such purpose and clarity, such passion and humility.

And I simply can’t complete that thought without mentioning Professor Veena Sahajwalla who displays all of these qualities and who so very kindly invited me here today.

I recently travelled to China, with Veena, and five other outstanding Australian women.
We toured the impressive Australian and Chinese pavilions at the Shanghai World Expo.

And,

in addition to official state meetings required of me as part of my role,

we “sisters” were able to participate in a number of highly successful engagements with men and women of the Shanghai and Beijing business and academic communities.

You may chuckle at its hint of 70s feminism, but we are among a group of 22 women in fact referred to as the “Sisters” and whose stories feature at the Australian pavilion in Shanghai.

These women are:

at the frontier of their disciplines

in medicine, science, engineering, agriculture and the environment

working for more sustainable cities and communities.

Seeing my eminent travel companions in action during our visit to China filled me with enormous joy and hope for women’s growing participation in society.

And hearing Veena speak at a students’ forum at Peking University about her academic and professional journey:

reinforced to me the capacity we all have now

to reach and influence

widely and readily.

This is critical to dealing with sustainability issues because they are universal and belong to us all.

It’s critical to the success of the work of everyone here, and, of course, to the success of this symposium.

Here, we see:

global partnerships in sustainable ironmaking

we see the world leadership of this university’s Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology

we see a specific research focus on the future uses of coal and iron ore in ironmaking – resources that are obviously vital to Australia’s trade and wealth

and we see joint research and commercial endeavours that are translating scientific and engineering breakthroughs into practice, and into the marketplace.

I listened recently to a fascinating talk given by American, Mr Ray Anderson, an industrial engineer, and the founder of Interface, a manufacturer of carpet tiles.

He’s been known in the States for nearly 40 years as the “serious carpet guy”.


It was a defining moment for Anderson.

He decided that he was in a position to make a difference:
to do some good
to take some deliberate and significant measures in his own business
measures that were specifically designed to help reverse the decline of the biosphere
and to redirect the company down a path to sustainability.

In the ensuing years, Interface has reduced its greenhouse emissions by 82%.
Fossil fuel usage is down by 60%. Water usage, by 75%.
Renewable or recyclable materials are 25% of the total. Renewable energy is 27% of the total.
They’ve diverted 74,000 tons of used carpet from landfill.
And their profits have doubled.

Interface’s promise is to eliminate any negative impact it may have on the environment by 2020.
They call it: “Mission Zero – the summit of Mount Sustainability”.

This is ambitious territory no doubt, but Ray Anderson says they’re over halfway to their goal.

As you know, it’s hard, complex work.

With your expertise, you trust that the solutions are there, but your experience tells you that it takes:
time and good timing
patience
trial and error
out-of-the-box thinking
and many dollars
to get it right.

Clearly, we are still at a stage with these issues and challenges where the obstacles are plentiful.

This is the course that innovation takes.

And then, we turn the corner:
and the achievements begin to outnumber the impediments
and sustainability moves from the fringe to the mainstream.

What makes a difference to this outcome, I think:
and I’m really now returning to where I started
is the strength and depth of your collaboration
and the sense of responsibility you share for the future of the planet.

Ray Anderson offered this – not what you’d expect from a “serious carpet guy”:
We are, each and every one, a part of the web of life. The continuum of humanity, sure. But in a larger sense, the web of life itself.

And we have a choice to make during our brief visit to this beautiful blue and green living planet.

To hurt it or to help it.

It’s your call, he said.

Delegates, each of you, like Anderson, has made your call.

I give you my greatest support and encouragement in your own quest to the summit of Mount Sustainability.

And I wish you well in your coming discussions.

It is now my sincere pleasure to declare open the 2010 International Symposium on Sustainable Ironmaking.