

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
A CIVIC RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL
WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL ADMINISTRATION CENTRE
11 NOVEMBER 2005

- Councillor Alex Darling, Lord Mayor of Wollongong and Mrs Darling
- Councillors
- Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for your warm welcome to Marlena and me, on our first official visit to this magnificent region of Australia. At the outset I recognise the traditional owners of this land.

I can think of no finer reason to visit your community than to share in the solemn commemoration of Remembrance Day; to honour those 60,000 Australians who lost their lives in World War One and whose supreme sacrifice left a void in the hearts of their parents, spouses, children, loved ones and friends; and on communities right around Australia.

Ladies and gentlemen. I understand that from the first small nucleus of European settlement along the shores of Lake Illawarra and the Macquarie Rivulet in the 1820s, land grants brought people south towards Kiama, north towards Bulli and inland to Kangaroo Valley. According to the history of Wollongong commissioned by the City Council, the names of those early grantees reads like a "Who's Who" of colonial society - including D'Arcy Wentworth, Mary Reiby and Gregory Blaxland.

By 1828, most employment in the Wollongong region was timber getting and land clearing for farming - it's a story repeated by pioneers throughout Australia.

Yet few centres could recognise the impact and magnitude of the coal industry that developed here, and with it the magnificent harbour which began shipping coal in 1849. No surprise then that in the six decades from 1840, Wollongong's population rose to more than 17,000, an increase exceeding 2000 per cent in that period.

It's often said that Australia has become the great nation it is - a cooperative, friendly one - because Australians have not lost their ability to face adversity square on, they are adaptable, they are innovative (prepared to "have a go"), and they believe in a "fair go", that is justice.

However, few communities have been without their share of significant hardships.

Wollongong itself has endured its share of challenges and learned to deal with them. From 1928 onwards the steelworks had dominated Wollongong's economic life, and by its nature also connected the region with the outside world. Like most Australians, I recall the era when your local economy was virtually reliant on BHP, in the days when it employed in excess of 22,000 people.

In 2005 however the workforce number in that industry is somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000.

So how does a close knit community absorb such a massive adjustment to its employment situation?

And how does an important regional city such as Wollongong contain its population so that it's not seen

simply as a dormitory suburb of a larger centre? Already some 19,000 people commute daily from here to Sydney, and I understand that forthcoming land releases will add in excess of 20,000 to Wollongong's population.

Part of the answer must lie in being as innovative and visionary as past generations in respect to diversification and employment opportunities.

And here, information is one of the keys to the future. Yet information of itself has limited value. It is how we use what we learn and discover, that transforms the information that comes our way. This is being done to good effect in a number of ways. Take for example various programs at the University of Wollongong, named Australia's top teaching university in August 2005.

The University's internationally recognised research includes:

- Intelligent material systems and nanotechnology which the University's Intelligent Polymer Research Institute is using in applications such as artificial body textiles for patients recovering from trauma or surgery;
- The Centre for Transnational Crime Prevention which has developed post graduate programs and national and international networks programs with the Australian Federal Police, ASEAN police organisations and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime; and
- The Centre for Maritime Policy which is the Asia-Pacific region's only academic centre for research on national and international maritime police, ocean law and maritime security.

Ladies and gentlemen. Rather than lament the unknowns or the "what ifs" about the future, Wollongong has adopted the notion of "*better to invent our own future than to stand by and watch it happen.*"

For example:

- the Illawarra Innovative Industry Network is promoting regional industrial firms to national and international business markets;
- Port Kembla will be a key location for the motor vehicle industry; it is expected by late 2006 that 140,000 vehicles will be handled annually, providing employment for around 1,000;
- Wollongong is taking enquiries from Chinese companies as prospective investors in this region; and
- The region is seeking to attract Indian investment and to make inroads into educational and tourism services.

I have been speaking about the critical importance of the India/China arc to Australia for the past two years. It is crucial for Australia to access the extraordinary opportunities that exist in partnership with our outer regional neighbours. The big question I believe is: how do we make ourselves more visible and valued as indispensable contributors to and a partner in the future prosperity of those 3 billion, intelligent, hard working and innovative people.

Ladies and gentlemen. What attracts people to Wollongong and the Illawarra region? Surely it's not just the beautiful landscape and ocean - as magnificent as these are?

I believe there are other factors, and I include here, the community's desire and ability to look after itself - to remain close knit yes - but also to look beyond its boundaries.

The Hagan Wells history of Wollongong opens its chapter entitled "The Garden of Illawarra" with this honest assessment: "*From the beginnings of European settlement, Illawarra's natural environment has attracted both developers and spoilers, and there has been tension between those who appreciated the intrinsic value of this environmental garden and those who saw in it only resources to be exploited. In time the exploiters created significant environmental damage; in turn, that damage provoked an environmental consciousness.*"

The point here is that there will be disagreements and frank exchanges of view from time to time in our communities, but none that cannot be worked through sensibly.

It seems to me that communities such as Wollongong have the capacity to manage the challenges - which this region has done, for well over 150 years.

Your contributions underpin the theme I have been repeating across Australia, urging Australians to aspire to become what I call a "Nation of Excellence - the Global Example".

A nation whose people - both individually and collectively - strive to be the very best at everything to which they turn their minds and hands. A nation that boasts the strongest families, the best institutions, the best economy, the best professions, the best environment; an admired national ethos.

And so I am delighted to be here to see something of what Wollongong is achieving as a community. Lord Mayor, Marlena and I thank you and your Council for making our visit such a memorable one and for supporting our program in the Illawarra.

We will be leaving with happy memories of today and look forward to returning for a longer stay in the not too distant future.

Thank you.