

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
2008 AUSTRALIAN CONSTRUCTION ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
SOFITEL HOTEL, MELBOURNE
9 MAY 2008

May I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today; their wisdom, enduring history and culture.

I are delighted to be here tonight with Marlena, to present this prestigious award and to meet so many skilled and dedicated people making a positive difference to our nation and its future.

We have recently returned from a visit to Israel and the Middle East and I mention this because of the remarkable engineering and construction feats we saw there.

These included the ancient biblical city of Er in Iraq where I was privileged to visit the house where Abraham the father of what was to become the Christian, Jewish and Islamic religions actually lived: about 20 squares in total area around 4000 years old and with the wells he used still in working order. Also, the Jewish Synagogue at Capernum, with marvellous hand cut stone and arches, only 2,000 years old and still in perfect condition.

We flew over the Pyramids in Egypt and one couldn't help contemplating their magnificent symmetry and size and how they were constructed using hand labour and the simple basic tools and machines of that time.

But then I think of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the mighty Snowy Mountain Hydro Scheme, the Sydney Opera House and the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway and realise that good engineering remains alive and well in our country.

Another highlight was to visit the planning headquarters for the Masdar City project in Abu Dhabi which is intended to be the world's first zero-carbon, zero-waste city, fully powered by renewable energy technologies, with a heavy emphasis on solar.

With seed funding of US\$15 billion, it is expected to eventually house 30-40,000 scientists, engineers and their families, who will work and live on site in implementing this extraordinary concept. Think of the synergies this will bring about in an environmental and engineering sense.

The development of Masdar City may have many lessons for us here in Australia as how we might live in future community harmony with our environment.

Perhaps Engineers Australia and the Australian Construction Association might see some value in further exploring the possibility of joint project development with Masdar.

But to the Construction Achievement Awards themselves.

To be a finalist for this Award is a remarkable achievement in itself as some of the most advanced construction and engineering projects this country has seen are being approved - projects using new ideas, innovative technology and the latest construction techniques, all with the purpose of providing practical benefits to our lives.

Many thousands of experts, including highly skilled architects, designers, engineers, skilled tradesmen and project managers have applied their expertise, often with demanding time frames for completion and normally under tight budgetary constraints.

And these projects are world class.

Something I particularly like about the Award finalists is that the community benefits flowing from their projects are so apparent.

For example, the citizens of Perth, Sydney and Queensland will have better access to fresh water; the communities of Perth and Sydney will have improved transport options; and the capacity constraints on the Gladstone coal loading berth in Queensland will be eased, leading to increased job prospects, export revenues and other community benefits.

With \$400 billion in annual building and construction activity and around a million people employed, the construction sector is also contributing hugely to the prosperity of our nation and our ability to be a leading global example of innovation and excellence.

We should not forget that many Australians now spend the majority of their day and indeed their lives in the built environment - and as recognised in the Masdar City project underway in Abu Dhabi - there is a responsibility to provide healthy, effective and efficient infrastructure to support our community's well-being.

And critically, your sector has an enormous influence, responsibility and ability to ensure that we are able to pass on to future generations, the unique, beautiful, yet fragile environment we are blessed with in Australia today.

Indeed, I was delighted to note the positive environmental and heritage attributes of the projects under consideration including the innovative employment of wind technology to produce clean energy for the Perth desalination plant, protecting a 1920's heritage building, the water table, the Swan River and the heritage listed Moreton Bay fig trees in the construction phase of the Perth MetroRail project.

These examples reflect a construction and engineering sector increasingly aware of the need to look after our natural and heritage environment and to reduce the ecological footprint of our built environment.

Before concluding, may I offer one final thought for your future consideration.

In my tours of Northern Australia, it has been clear that one of the major impediments to progress, has been the lack of cost-effective housing of reasonable amenity, not just for the indigenous population but also for the nurses, doctors, teachers, police and others who need to live there.

I wonder if there is more that you can do as pro-active organisations to support these communities with the design and construction of low maintenance, environmentally friendly modular units that can be quickly built under supervision with local labour.

Ladies and gentlemen

The 2008 Australian Construction Achievement Award provides recognition of the great achievements of the finalists and also inspiration for those involved in the design and construction of future engineering projects to grace our land.

I commend the sponsors for their support of this initiative; thank the judges for their time and expertise in achieving such high quality entries and wish Engineers Australia and the Australian Construction Association continuing success in furthering the cause of good engineering and construction in this country.

Thank you.