

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
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May I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today; their wisdom, enduring history and culture. And thank you Allen for your welcome to country.

As Patron of the Summit, it is a great pleasure for Marlina and me to be with you and to speak to you this morning.

I greatly enjoyed last night's dinner, the Prime Minister's pre-Budget speech and the oratory of former Prime Ministers Menzies and Keating. I thought also that the 26 leadership award winners were a wonderful cross-section of the depth of talent this country is producing.

Ladies and gentlemen

Ahead of you for the next few days lies the opportunity for a wide-ranging and illuminating discussion on the current issues, challenges and opportunities facing our nation, with inputs from widely acknowledged experts embracing many disciplines.

Our ongoing prosperity as a nation brings with it a responsibility to ensure that no group in our society is left behind - how we care for the least privileged will always be an important measure of our maturity and decency as a community.

Thus in discussing the policies and approaches which seek to raise the well-being of every member of the community, we must pay particular attention to those matters designed to address the special needs of groups such as our indigenous people, the aged, farmers and rural dwellers, veterans and people with a disability, including their carers.

What we all share I would suggest is a love of our nation and a desire to see it prosper in a secure and harmonious environment.

This is a valuable starting point for your deliberations.

And now for some personal thoughts. If I had to make an educated guess of the top ten issues facing humanity, and indeed this country, over the next 50 years, they would be in rough order:

1. Energy
2. Water
3. Food
4. Environment
5. Poverty
6. Terrorism and War
7. Disease
8. Education
9. Democracy; and
10. Population.

We should note that three of the top four - water, food and environment - are inevitably linked to the availability of energy.

It is suggested that we only have around 30 50 years supply of oil.

While we might be able to extend this to an extent by further exploration and there is a role for natural gas as a bridging fuel, we need to find the replacement renewable energy or alternative energy source/s that will allow for global sustainability, including minimum CO2 emissions, particularly in light of the higher living standard aspirations of a globe whose population is projected to be around 8-10 billion by 2050.

A globe which according to some estimates is already using 20 percent more resources than can be sustained.

The reducing oil supply and its increasingly high cost has major implications for Australia, in that as a trading and travelling nation we might be well-advised to examine opportunities for creating our own strategic fuel energy reserves, particularly when it comes to aircraft and shipping fuels.

It's relevant that Michael Wesley of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute has noted that energy security issues are likely to substantially reshape the great power relationships in the Asia Pacific.

A suggestion might be that as we have the equivalent of at least 29 billion barrels of oil in shale deposits in Central Queensland, it could be prudent to further examine how we could quickly develop the technology to exploit this vast potential fuel reserve in the event of an energy crisis or an induced fuel shortage.

We are also blessed with large areas of land in this country which with the right investment might be put to use to produce ethanol and other biofuels to further boost our strategic fuel reserves. Taking Michael Roux's point last night, such a decision would need to be carefully balanced to meet our food for domestic eating and export requirements, along with environmental considerations.

Nor should we discount the potential of new sophisticated nuclear technologies employing fuels such as Thorium, with its high energy density, cleaner and more manageable waste, and very importantly, its incapacity to produce weapons-grade fissionable materials. If Thorium is a feasible nuclear fuel alternative, it could take a lot of heat out of the traditional nuclear U235 debate. It so happens that Australia also has a good percentage of the world's Thorium.

Marlena and I recently travelled to the Middle East to participate in the 60th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the State of Israel.

I was able to visit a number of scientific establishments including the Weizmann Institute of Science which is working on renewable energy including hydrogen, biomass, solar and fuel cell technologies. Their very strong view was that notwithstanding any improvements we might see in clean coal technologies, solar energy offers us the best prospect as a large scale, clean sustainable energy source. I would think that solar scientists at the Australian National University might support that view.

The Australian scientists suggest that they could meet the total energy needs of Australia with a solar panel array of around 50 kilometres square. How to store and then distribute that energy remains the technical problem requiring rapid resolution.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting a facility near Perth which employs a brilliant technology that uses wave energy to push a series of under the surface salt water filled rubber balls, around 2 metres in diameter, each of which is attached to a rod that compresses sea water in a cylinder at high pressure, which then drives a turbine to produce electricity. As part of that process the high pressure seawater can be passed through a fine membrane filter to produce fresh water using reverse osmosis principles.

Magnificent science and engineering.

The company suggests that this process could be used to pump fresh water into adjacent agricultural lands.

Also in Perth, it is wind power that is providing the totally clean energy source for the desalination plant recently constructed; the third largest in the world, producing 144 M/L of fresh water daily, or 17 per cent of the city's total fresh water requirements.

Whatever the solution or solutions to our critical energy needs, I am keen to see even higher levels of participation in joint research and information exchange between Australian and overseas research agencies, such as the Weizmann Institute.

I would suggest that for the benefit of future generations we must constantly question the adequacy of continuing with a 'business as usual' approach.

For example, have we given sufficient attention to the notion that as a planet of 6 billion people we are already consuming around 20 percent more resources than our globe can sustain?

What will be the impact on the Earth's resources of a population estimated to be of the order of 8 10 billion by 2050? What might be the global social and security consequences?

Severe, I would think.

Do we as Australians have to re-think our values in respect of genuine need as against a somewhat extravagant, throw away, material ownership mentality?

In this the driest of continents, should we be looking at diverting water from the wetter north of the country, or should we relocate or develop new infrastructure in the north to take advantage of the availability of plentiful water, energy, minerals and space; or perhaps implement a combination of both.

Why do we seem to remain satisfied with simply ripping mineral ores out of the ground to export, when we have all the resources close to hand to convert them to products that other, far less well endowed countries make instead? I can't believe it's all tied up with the relative cost of labour.

Could we improve our water management in agriculture through greater use of piping, contour ploughing and damming, dam covering, alley farming, limited till ploughing and drip watering? Israel certainly believes so.

Is it appropriate that we continue to export our increasingly expensive water in the form of highly water-dependent food production, an example being the estimated 50,000 to 100,000 litres required to produce a single kilogram of beef?

Overall, we need to be constantly reappraising how we couple technology with our use of land, water and energy resources, to provide the most cost-effective and environmentally responsible solutions to support our population and export industries.

And what of the fundamental fabric of our society; the family?

Can we do more to strengthen the family unit, to better prepare young people for adulthood and to strengthen their sense of social responsibility?

Some one million Australian children aged up to 17 years now live with just one of their parents, mostly women, many of whom are doing it tough.

How we can not only support these children's future well-being, but also find ways and means to reduce the very high incidence of family break-up.

I believe this can be done.

With my own term of office nearing completion, I should like to address some remarks on the governance of this nation, emphasising that contrary to some media reports, I have never postulated support for any particular position relating to a system of governance.

What I have said is that in any healthy democracy there will, and should always be, debate over the structures and processes that uphold it.

And we should not shy away from asking the question, how can we better govern ourselves in the modern world?

How can governments both state and federal on 3-4 year electoral cycles and operating under a Westminster opposition philosophy to oppose - plan strategically over the essential 20-30 year time frames to deal with the central issues of our time? Should we be thinking more on how we can achieve greater political bi-partisan consensus on the broad thrust of long term strategic direction, with perhaps the major political arguments and debates focusing on the details of policy implementation - budget, timing, location, numbers etc.

During my term, I have urged, and I continue to urge, all Australians to have a broad understanding of our Constitution, how our parliaments and local governments work, the role of the judiciary in interpreting and upholding the rule of law, and the important role of the Governor-General and State Governors in the constitutional process, including their key role in its checks and balance arrangements.

Without that knowledge, I suggest that it will be difficult to have effective, informed and balanced debate on change and I support all efforts to educate the community and especially our young people on these matters; that is the teaching of civics.

I like to think that the Governor-general's website, averaging over 700 000 hits per month is helping to play a useful, educative role in our governance arrangements.

Ultimately, of course the decision to change the structures and processes of governance is rightly a decision for the Australian people and the parliament of the day, but I would urge that it be an informed one.

Ladies and gentlemen

As science and information technology allows us to drill down ever deeper into understanding the detail of our world, it's essential that we also look at how we can better synthesise, integrate and coordinate across what have sometimes been rather narrow, sometimes parochial and traditionally vertical stovepipes of inquiry.

For example, when we look back at some of the iconic initiatives of the past such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme, we see benefits arising in unexpected areas.

As well as providing plentiful electricity and water, the Snowy Scheme is now recognised as a powerful catalyst in the development of our harmonious and culturally diverse society.

Our cultural diversity is now one of our great national strengths, in a time of globalisation and instability in other parts of the world.

The surf lifesaving movement is credited with saving more than 500,000 lives in the past century, yet also provides an important training ground for the community leaders of tomorrow.

Youngsters learn about teamwork, achieving personal goals, taking responsibility, the importance of giving back to the community and looking after the unique and fragile beauty of our natural

environment.

Our ability to develop approaches that provide benefits across multiple areas will be increasingly important in the future.

We should also recognise that much of our success and our ability to innovate and improve comes from those who have trod the path before us.

We can learn particularly from the wisdom of our indigenous people and their ability over some 60,000 years to live in harmony and sustainably in this land.

We have the vision of our founding fathers, including Edmund Barton, Samuel Griffith and Alfred Deakin, who, in their wisdom, gave us a Constitution that has been changed on only eight occasions.

We also have the proud record of the Australian defence forces going back prior to Federation, who have defended the values enshrined in our Constitution in many theatres, and by so doing given us the freedom to flourish as a peace loving and generous democracy.

To conclude.

Australia and her people are blessed with magnificent assets; including a strong economy, plentiful natural resources and a skilled and flexible workforce - assets we can use to further benefit all Australians, our region and the world in which we live.

No-one should be in any doubt that we are at an important threshold in terms of the challenges and opportunities this country faces.

And that what we achieve as a nation over the next decade will have far reaching consequences for Australia's long-term future.

Innovation, excellence and leadership are critical if we are to continue to move forward positively and effectively as a nation and I know these attributes will be very much to the fore in your discussions at this Summit.

As Patron, I am delighted to formally declare the Summit open, and I encourage you to seize this opportunity to powerfully influence the nation's future.

Thank you.