

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
DINNER FOR THE FEDERAL MINISTRY
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA
17 JUNE 2008

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

It is a great pleasure for Marlena and me to welcome you back to Government House and to share some more relaxed moments with you.

I know there will be an opportunity further down the track to say a more formal farewell, however I would like to use this occasion to personally thank you and your staffs for your support of me and my office in carrying out my various constitutional, ceremonial and community functions.

During my term, it has been a privilege to be associated with two Federal Governments.

And post the election, I was very proud of my country and its parliamentary institutions; the transition of power was smooth, with goodwill demonstrated between both sides of politics.

Prime Minister, I think you will agree that your swearing-in and first Executive Council meeting happened in true Australian style.

It's not in every country that a school group of some 150 children can stand, wave and cheer at witnessing such a momentous occasion from a distance of only 150 metres from where we were seated in full view of them. I don't think they could believe their eyes! And judging by their excitement, I'm sure it is an event they will never forget.

Since my term began in August 2003, I have presided at more than 130 meetings of the Executive Council, with around 2700 agenda items considered.

Its substantial regulatory function with its in built checks and balances is an important component of our governance system and I have been very impressed by the attention to detail and the preparation by new ministers in tendering advice in the meetings.

In particular, I express my appreciation to the Prime Minister and Senator John Faulkner, as Vice-President of the Council, for their continued support and encouragement.

In the first six months of your government, the Council has met a dozen or so times, enabling me to witness first hand many of your important aspirations and work programs being implemented.

Ladies and gentlemen

Our nation owes its long-term prosperity, security and social cohesion to our proud record as one of the world's oldest and strongest democracies.

We are a fortunate country - a country blessed with clean air, good health systems, a small but supremely capable defence force, a just legal system, freedom of speech, religion and association, and

the right to vote.

That our country remains in such fundamentally good shape is largely due to the work of our Parliaments and Parliamentarians - in instigating, debating and passing good laws, as well as maintaining and improving our governance arrangements - aided by the advice and assistance of a loyal and competent Australian Public Service.

Your government's commitment to ensuring transparent, responsive and participatory governance is commendable.

I think we would all agree that whilst we are in general good order, there are substantial challenges to be faced - energy, agriculture, water, climate change, social condition - there are great opportunities to be had for a nation prepared to be hard-working, innovative and caring.

And I know you are addressing these issues in a diligent and responsible manner, for the benefit of all Australians.

Recent examples have been the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, the apology to our indigenous people, and the 2020 Summit.

It was a pleasure to support the Summit initiative, as I am a strong believer that the currency of the future is new ideas.

I hope you will continue to involve the public in developing long-term strategies for the nation's future.

Prime Minister, in closing, let me say how much I enjoy our close association - our discussions during our monthly breakfasts will be one of the many things I shall miss come September.

Furthermore, I commend you for recommending Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce as our next Governor-General.

From my own knowledge of her I am sure she will make a valuable contribution to the nation in this role.

Ladies and gentlemen

It has been a wonderful privilege to have travelled the length and breadth of this continent many times and to have met many, many thousands of its people.

It has been a privilege to have represented Australia overseas on no fewer than 21 occasions and hopefully through the establishment of close friendships with many leaders to have improved our bi-lateral relationships.

And it has been a pleasure to fulfil our constitutional and ceremonial roles, involving as they do, quite detailed and close linkages with government ministers and parliamentary secretaries.

It has been a special pleasure to have attended some 1150 community functions including over 150 with the ADF.

It has also been a pleasure working with you all and I look forward to continuing to do so over the next few months.

Marlena and I wish you all the best for the future in your very important parliamentary duties.

Thank you.