

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
FAREWELL RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE PREMIER OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, PERTH
30 JUNE 2008

Premier - thank you for hosting this reception to mark our last official visit to Western Australia; it is an honour greatly appreciated by Marlena and me.

I congratulate you and the people of this State on the remarkable contribution you are all making to national prosperity - WA being recognised around Australia and internationally as the powerhouse of the Australian economy.

With around ten percent of Australia's population, WA is the national example of get up and go, with its expanding mineral and energy industries, burgeoning exports, high investor and business confidence and commitment to innovation.

The five years of our appointment have passed very quickly and been the most stimulating, wide-ranging and demanding years of my life - a life I might add only possible with Marlena's magnificent and totally dedicated support.

It has been stimulating in travelling the length and breadth of the continent to meet people from all walks of life and witnessing the inspiration, the hard work, the courage and compassion of people working for the benefit of their fellow men and women and to better the country as a whole.

Some highlights include:

. The tremendous community response following the Maitland and Mackay floods and the caring spirit demonstrated by the many volunteers and emergency services workers as each community came to terms with their loss and began the long process of recovery.

. Visiting Beltana on the Birdsville Track where the Reverend John Flynn conceived the idea of the 'Mantle of Safety for Australia' which evolved into the Flying Doctor Service and seeing the wonderful work of the School of the Air in giving children in remote areas access to quality education.

. Seeing the work of Gerald Neesham and the Clontarf Foundation in Western Australia developing some 27 high level sporting programs, compulsorily linked to school attendance to provide purpose and guidance to troubled Aboriginal teenagers.

. Supporting your wonderful School Volunteer Program in Western Australia with around 1800 'grandparent equivalents', mentoring some 4000 children annually who are lacking in literacy, numeracy and social skills. Well done to Mrs Christine Gray and her team. I would ask that we all get behind Christine in her bid to make this a National Program. I give my public commitment to so doing.

. Viewing your remarkable advances in renewable energy and improved management of water, including a wave energy facility in Western Australia which uses brilliant but simple technology to produce electricity and desalinated water.

. Inspecting innovative farming technologies with the potential to revolutionise crop yields, water use

and environmental outcomes. These include underground drip irrigation on raised beds for maize crops in northern Victoria, now using 20 per cent less water than with traditional watering methods - also contour ploughing and damming, limited till sowing and alley farming, as so successfully employed in this state.

As Governor-General, I have had the great privilege of approving more than 40,000 Australians for honours and awards; including nine last Thursday to members of our Special Air Service Regiment for bravery and superior performance in Afghanistan.

And engaging with organisations such as the Scouts and cadets, Guides, surf-lifesavers, CROCFEST, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, the Sir John Monash Foundation, and the Big Brother Movement has been especially rewarding - all devoted to the development and support of young people, to help them achieve individual goals of excellence, and in so doing make an enhanced contribution to our nation.

On the international stage, hosting world leaders such as Presidents Bush, Hu Jintao of China, Vladimir Putin of Russia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia and Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan has been exciting, stimulating and beneficial to our bi-lateral relationships.

We have had the privilege to represent Australia overseas on many memorable occasions, including:

- . attending the ANAC Day services in Gallipoli in 2006;
- . attending the weddings of Frederick and Mary in Copenhagen, Charles and Camilla in England;
- . attending President Reagan's and Pope John-Paul the Second's deeply moving funeral services;
- . seeing the fine work of our police and soldiers of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands;
- . visiting our splendidly trained and high performing Defence Force personnel in Iraq, Afghanistan, East Timor and other theatres;
- . visiting Papua New Guinea including the Kokoda Track; and
- . attending deeply moving commemoration services in Belgium at Tyne Cot, Menin Gate and Polygon Wood

There are hundreds more experiences I could relate, but what was really special for both Marlena and me has been the privilege to meet many thousands of Australian citizens who as volunteers have been motivated by compassion and a capacity for hard work.

There are about 5 million of them in this country providing some 3 ½ hours of voluntary service each week; an incredible contribution. I thank all of you present who volunteer in some capacity or other.

For the future, I am keen to continue promoting the building of capacity in this country in three areas: excellence, innovation and leadership, which I have defined over the years as aspiring to be a Nation of Excellence - The Global Example.

The stronger we are as a nation in terms of our innovative capability, our management and leadership skills, and in our social cohesion as communities, the better placed we will be in terms of our international standing and competitiveness - or to put it more simply, we will be in a position where other nations want to trade and learn from us rather than be in conflict with us.

But we do have big issues to face. Of pressing concern is how to best manage in a sustainable way the world's finite natural resources, including energy, food and water.

One recent analysis suggests developed societies are already consuming around 20 percent more resources than our planet can sustain.

With a projected 9 to 10 billion people on our globe by the year 2050, we have to face the inevitable challenge of how to feed and support a population of this size in a sustainable way. Alarmingly we are already seeing a shortage of staples in some countries and the hardships and conflicts flowing from that.

The availability, ownership and distribution of clean water is also increasingly a global issue.

How we manage this vital resource is likely to have significant security, economic and social implications for almost every country on the globe.

Science and technology will help to provide some solutions to these pressing problems. But we also urgently need to consider the social implications and adjustments that might be required if the world is to live in harmony and sustainably with finite resources.

Finally, with my own term nearing its end, it is appropriate to reflect briefly in a non political way on the governance of Australia

In any healthy democracy there will, and should always be, debate over the structures and philosophies that uphold it, and how we might improve them.

During my term, I have urged, and continue to urge, all Australians to better understand our system of Government; including key aspects of our Constitution, how our parliaments work, the role of the judiciary and importantly the key function of State Governors and the Governor-General in our checks and balance systems.

Without that knowledge, I would suggest that we cannot have effective, informed and balanced debate, and I support all efforts to better educate the community and especially our young people on these matters. Your Constitutional Centre in Perth already does much to fulfil that laudable aim and I hope other States and Territories will follow suit in establishing similar places of Constitutional education.

Ladies and gentlemen to conclude.

At my swearing-in five years ago, I promised to fulfil the constitutional and public obligations of this high office, with dedication, dignity and integrity, and to uphold those values that continue to make for a happy, cohesive and tolerant society. We have done our best as a couple to meet that undertaking.

In my final Australia Day message this year, I pursued the theme of 'caring'; by encouraging all Australians to care for ourselves (meaning our personal health), for our families (on the basis of social cohesion), for one another (in volunteerism), and for the land in which we are so lucky to live (our environment).

Ultimately, in the concept and fulfilment of 'caring', lies the secret to a happy, sustainable and cohesive nation.

Thank you.