

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**MORNING TEA FOR THE INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERING SUMMER
SCHOOL**
ADMIRALTY HOUSE, SYDNEY
15 JULY 2008

Good morning to you all and welcome to Admiralty House.

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

Speaking of history, one of the ideas I have consistently suggested as Governor-General is to revamp the way we teach Australian history nationwide, by teaching it comprehensively from 60 000 years back.

If taught properly and correctly, I believe it would do a great deal to improve indigenous pride and self esteem in belonging to the oldest continuous civilisation on earth.

One of the special pleasures of my role over the past five years has been to meet with members and groups of the community from all regions and walks of life, and to see those individuals and organisations prosper. The Summer School has been one such group that we have seen grow and develop.

It has been a special pleasure to see role models such as Leon and Ben set themselves on a path of personal growth and life-long learning as they commence what I am sure will be long and successful careers; careers in which I hope they will always find the time to be mentors to those needing a bit of a helping hand.

Indeed Ben's work with the students as a mentor and role model for others, proves the capacity of the Summer School to build an expanding network of Indigenous engineers, as well as reflecting the quality of his own personal character and generosity of spirit.

While there is serious under-representation of engineers among the indigenous communities, I take heart in the progress made through the Summer School.

As well as fostering an interest in engineering or studies in other fields, the School has brought the issue of under-representation to the attention of some significant groups, with some equally significant results.

I am referring especially to the tremendous support and interest demonstrated by the Universities of New South Wales and Newcastle and the larger engineering employers.

It is also exciting to know that Curtin University of Technology in cooperation with the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy is examining plans to introduce a similar program in the summer of 2009.

This reflects an increasing recognition that all young Indigenous Australians wherever they are deserve the opportunity to secure a good education.

This was a point well taken by that former great Australian Rules footballer and coach Gerald Neesham when he established his Clontarf Foundation in Perth, in which he provides top rate coaching in football and netball for aboriginal boys and girls, but only on the basis of them attending Years 11 and 12 of schooling at schools located nearby.

So successful has this concept been that there are some 27 similar facilities established nationwide.

I have noted with pleasure that the youngsters we have met have been some of the finest physical and mentally alert specimens that I have seen anywhere in this country. And all it has taken has been encouragement with commitment.

We all know that the transition to adulthood can be a time of uncertainty for any youngster and a little support and encouragement at the right moment - someone showing they care - can make a very positive difference to one's personal development and future.

It is so very important that we encourage indigenous young people to aspire to a Tertiary Education and to show them that it is within their reach.

And an engineering qualification is an exceptionally valuable asset, both in terms of employability in times of an acute national skill shortage and in providing skills that could help address the urgent infrastructure needs of many indigenous communities.

Ladies and gentlemen - I have always found it disappointing when visiting a number of remote area communities, to find that building construction, plumbing, electrical and vehicle maintenance services and road works are in the main conducted by non indigenous people.

This has to change quickly, so that it is local indigenous people who are doing this important work, as well as being the local police officers, teachers, nurses and doctors.

This is why the Indigenous Australian Engineering Summer School is a tremendous force for good among indigenous Australians and in the wider community.

We should all be grateful that it has prospered under the dedicated stewardship of Bob Hawke and Jeff Dobell and with the continuing support of many other individuals, organisations, sponsors and donors, including all of you present here this morning.

I especially commend the Universities of New South Wales and Newcastle for their laudable efforts in hosting the Summer School.

Finally, this initiative would be nowhere without the students who have fulfilled the promise and expectations placed upon them, and by so doing demonstrated deep pride in their indigenous heritage, and in the process set a tremendous example as role models for others.

I congratulate and thank Ben Lange who attended the second summer school in 1999 and graduated from the University of NSW as an electrical engineer.

Throughout and post his studies Ben has continued to support the Summer School as a very popular mentor.

I offer my best wishes to all present and future graduates of the School and look forward to its further success and expansion in the years to come.

And I thank once more, all of you here this morning who so ably support the Summer school in various important ways.

Good luck to you all and thank you.