

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 NEW SOUTH WALES
GOVERNOR MACQUARIE TOWER, SYDNEY
16 JULY 2008

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

Premier - thank you for your very kind words and for hosting this reception to mark our last official visit to New South Wales; it is an honour greatly appreciated by Marlena and me, and could I congratulate you and the people of Sydney on the wonderful reception being accorded to the many visitors taking part in the World Youth Day celebrations, with His Holiness, the Pope.

The early history of this state in the years following European settlement, is also the beginning of our inspiring story as a colonial nation - a story of initial instability and near disaster as food crops failed for the early settlers, but with growing purpose, confidence and achievement, following the crossing of the Blue Mountains and the establishment of agricultural and mining industries, and of course, the outback legend; a legend so beautifully evoked in the poems and writings of Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson.

Today, New South Wales is blessed with the jewel of this beautiful harbour city, and strong regional centres.

With nearly one in three Australians living in New South Wales and with plentiful land and natural resources, this State excels in every aspect of Australia's national life, including innovation and research, education, healthcare, volunteer activities, commerce, sport and the arts.

My family has long had a close affinity with this State; Marlena was born here, as was our eldest son, and I had the privilege of commanding the Australian Army's mechanised and airborne brigade at Holsworthy in the early 1980s.

We have taken great pride in being the custodians of a recently refurbished Admiralty House and gardens during our time in office and using it to welcome and thank many people and organisations from this State such as Foodbank, the Big Brother Movement, the Indigenous Engineering Summer School and Essere - representatives of organisations and individuals devoted to the support of others and making a very positive contribution to the state and nation as a result.

Indeed, Marlena and I have had between us the pleasure of being Patron to around 200 charitable or not-for-profit organisations, many with a significant presence in this State, and with representatives of a number of these organisations here tonight.

Indeed you are representatives of almost 5 million Aussies giving around 3½ hours per week of time to voluntary activities. The country could not function without you.

I thank you and your volunteer compatriots most sincerely for this magnificent contribution.

Ladies and gentlemen

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 made only possible with Marlena's

magnificent and totally dedicated support.

Some highlights include:

. The tremendous community response following the Newcastle, Maitland and Mackay floods and the caring spirit demonstrated by the thousands of 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 the 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. I had the great privilege two years ago of launching the National Youth Mentoring Network here in Sydney - it being a national support service for mentors working with youth in schools and the wider community, and forming a terrific adjunct to the School Volunteer Program which I am also keen to see expand nationwide.

. Viewing many remarkable advances in renewable energy (solar, wind and wave power), and improved management of water, including the outstandingly innovative work of Peter Andrews here in New South Wales known as Natural Sequence Farming.

. Engaging with organisations such as the Scouts and cadets, Guides, surf-lifesavers, CROCFEST, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and the Sir John Monash Foundation 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.

As Governor-General, I have had the great privilege of approving more than 40,000 Australians for honours and awards to people from all walks of life, united by a love of their country and a desire to excel and help others.

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. Gallantry awards to our servicemen in Iraq and Afghanistan have been some of the most deserving I have seen in over 50 years of military service.

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

. Attending the ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli in 2006

. 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

. Observing 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

. Being welcomed by around 10 000 Papua New Guinean citizens lining the streets of Wewak when we visited the battalion I commanded there at Independence in 1975.

. Attending deeply moving commemoration services in Belgium at Tyne Cot, Menin Gate, Polygon Wood and here at home.

We do live in a wonderful democracy, but 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 its finite resources.

Domestically, I remain very concerned at the catastrophic rate of family breakup, with now some 1 million children living with a single parent, mostly Mum, and many of whom are doing it tough. It seems only sensible to me, that we should look at better ways of preparing young people for relationships; be it brother to sister, boyfriend to girlfriend, husband to wife, or partner to partner. It can be done, as I know from personal experience.

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.

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 that cohesive families form the basis of a happy and prosperous society), for one another (in volunteering to help others), 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.