

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
FAREWELL SPEECH TO DINNER HOSTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER
GREAT HALL, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA
26 AUGUST 2008

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Honourable Dr Brendan Nelson, thank you both for your wonderfully kind words on behalf of the Parliament and the people of Australia.

Marlena and I are simply overwhelmed at the honour you have done us in hosting this function in the Great Hall of our Parliament.

Since August 2003, it has been my privilege to serve the people of Australia as Governor General - a period in which I have been delighted to personally observe our nation advance on many fronts.

And in frequently travelling the length and breadth of this vast country and in meeting citizens from all walks of life, Marlena and I have encountered a heart warming and inspirational story of service above self, of a nation motivated by a capacity for hard work, an increasing desire to achieve excellence in all that we undertake and by compassion.

As a people, we are profoundly enriched by the wisdom of our indigenous communities, and their proud example of living sustainably on this continent for 60 millennia. Indeed, I hope we will see that history taught comprehensively in our education system as part of the wider Australian history syllabus.

We enjoy a stable democracy and are blessed with a cohesive, culturally diverse and compassionate society, in which a quarter of us (5 million people), perform volunteer service to help others or protect our environment.

Our life expectancy has been increasing and is among the highest in the world.

Across the country, our workforce and entrepreneurs have toiled hard and innovatively to fuel sustained economic expansion, which supports excellent healthcare and other services, as well as good educational opportunities for our children.

We are well-regarded internationally - throughout the region and in global forums - and with our defence forces serving in peace keeping and other roles overseas with the distinction and Aussie compassion for which they are renowned.

Marlena and I have just returned from a visit to China to meet with President Hu Jintao and his senior leadership, to encourage even more Australian entrepreneurs to trade with China and to proudly cheer on our Olympic athletes as they excelled on the world sporting stage and made our hearts swell with pride - they were and are magnificent and major contributors to the soul and spirit of our nation.

Earlier this evening, I spoke to Members of Parliament on how our nation flourishes with the support of its core democratic institutions - the Australian Parliament, the Executive Government, the High Court and other federal Courts, the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Public Service.

Each of these has served us well in one form or another for over one hundred years, and continues able and willing to address the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing society and a dynamic, if

sometimes uncertain, global environment.

Our strengths should make us confident in our ability to successfully tackle major issues such as climate change, managing the likely limited availability of natural resources such as water, food and energy and in addressing indigenous and wider social disadvantage.

Ladies and gentlemen

At my swearing-in I promised 'to do my best to fulfil the constitutional and public obligations of this high office, with dedication, dignity and integrity'.

It has very much been a team effort and I thank Marlena for her magnificent and totally dedicated support in co-hosting hundreds of functions, in attending hundreds more, as patron in her own right of some 40 charitable groups, in accompanying me on over 20 overseas visits, for her knowledgeable and active involvement in refurbishing Admiralty House, whilst at the same time being a loving and involved daughter, daughter-in-law, mother and grandmother to our large and widely dispersed family.

In our community role, we have had the privilege to support and raise awareness of some marvellous people and organisations:

- . 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;
- . the wonderful School Volunteer Program also in Western Australia with around 1800 'grandparent equivalents', mentoring some 4000 children annually who are lacking in literacy, numeracy and social skills; and
- . organisations such as the Scouts, Guides, St John Ambulance, the cadets, surf-lifesavers, CROCFEST, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and the Sir John Monash Foundation - 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.

Our future prosperity and success depends in large part on our ability to innovate and live sustainably on this continent, so I have been heartened to witness at first hand, so much outstanding innovation including:

- . a remarkable facility capturing the ocean's wave energy to produce electricity and desalinated water with no greenhouse gas emissions;
- . Natural Sequence Farming as developed by Mr Peter Andrews, to restore over time and by natural means, the fertility of our soils and the sustainability of our agricultural production; and
- . at the University of New South Wales, the extraction of Hydrogen - the cleanest of energy sources - from salt water using the sun's energy.

There are hundreds more examples - all giving confidence in our ability to manage issues such as climate change and the impact of pressures on future availability of natural resources including food, clean air, energy and water.

Indeed, the imminent rise of large, highly educated populations in China and India underscores the importance of continuing to build our capacity in what I have termed as 'A Nation of Excellence - The Global Example'.

For it is only through being the best at everything we undertake, whether as Mums and Dads, tradesmen, scientists, engineers, nurses or teachers - that we will maintain our essential international standing and competitiveness.

As I complete some 53 years of service to the nation, I have tried to think of one word that encapsulates my hopes and aspirations for it.

And that word is 'caring'.

How we care for ourselves (meaning our personal health and fitness); for our families (as 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.

May I conclude my remarks this evening in applauding the appointment of Ms Quentin Bryce as my successor, noting with pleasure her exceptional personal qualities and achievements. Marlena and I wish her and Michael every success and happiness in their Vice-Regal role.

Thank you all for being here tonight at this lovely function.

May God bless our nation and its people.