Speech

Address By

Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

On the occasion of

Australian of the Year 2014

Government House, Canberra
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Mr Adam Gilchrist

Chair, National Australia Day Council

Mr Jeremy Lasek

CEO, National Australia Day Council

2013 Australian of the year award recipients and 2014 finalists

My friends, I am delighted to welcome you to Yarralumla this evening as we prepare to celebrate Australia Day 2014.

I do so with respectful acknowledgment of the traditional keepers of this land, the Ngunnawal people.

Australia Day marks a turning point in our summer calendars – for many of us, weeks of relaxation and fun are about to be succeeded by the commitments of work and study, the rhythms of daily routine, albeit with the a new charge of enthusiasm and energy, and hope that the year ahead will be an auspicious one.

I love the spontaneity of January in Australia – spending time with children, family and friends, barbecues and scratch meals, playing and watching sport, enjoying our sunshine, sea and sand, in the shade with a book.

On Australia Day, we gather at picnics and parties, concerts and community events.

We talk, share ideas, experiences, plans and aspirations.

This sort of engagement is critical to our understanding of each other and our sense of belonging to a cohesive and supportive community.
We honour and celebrate our diversity, the special culture of Indigenous Australians and the enrichment that new immigrants bring to our country.

We think of ADF men and women serving overseas, and others, especially volunteers, who have spent time during the holidays helping people in need.

My friends, 2014 marks the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War.

This was a hugely significant event for Australia as a new nation.

Our involvement was seen as a moral commitment and a testing ground for individual and national character.

The formation of the Australian Imperial Force, events at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, recognition of the contribution of our Diggers – all had enduring impact for our national identity, ideals and values.

On the home front, there were economic and social repercussions that stimulated industrial expansion, the modernisation of the work force and the flourishing of the women’s movement.

One of our heroes, Douglas Mawson, completed his Australasian Antarctic Expedition, with huge implications for Australian science and diplomacy.

1914 was the dawn of a new era, and 100 years later, it is good to reflect on how those events have contributed to the marvellous sense of spirit we are proud to claim as Australian.

In this role, I have been privileged to see the very best of our country and our people.

To share enriching conversations. Civility, thoughtfulness, spontaneity and enthusiasm shine through.

So too, courage and determination, humour and toughness in the face of adversity.

Again and again when I offer thanks, acknowledgment, admiration, I get a dig in the ribs, a self-effacing “that’s my job”.

Ladies and gentlemen, our Australians of the Year encapsulate the finest qualities. They are men and women who aspire to be, and do, their best to find constructive and creative ways to build a better world.

They have in common a desire to help others. They know what the concept of giving truly means.

I am thrilled that the 2013 award Winners are here this evening: Ita Buttrose, Ian Maddocks, Akram Azimi and Shane Phillips. Influential advocates, bold and driven.

I want to thank each one for the way you have used the opportunities that the awards bring to promote the ideals you stand for. I know that you will continue to do so with passion.

The 2014 finalists are an exceptional group. They represent the many faces of contemporary Australia – scientists, engineers and doctors, teachers, artists and community service providers, people working in the most practical of ways toward reconciliation, champions for the disadvantaged and vulnerable.
We offer our congratulations to all State and Territory award nominees in the four categories. Your personal and professional profiles are a source of inspiration, pride and affection.

Thank you for what you do.

My friends, warmest greetings for Australia Day 2014. Thank you for being part of this significant and happy occasion.