What a great day it is today!

All over Australia people are celebrating, reflecting and rejoicing in a long weekend, and perhaps even contemplating a busy year to come.

It’s high summer and it’s Australia Day!

In ceremonies all around the country, thousands of people have proudly become new Australian citizens.

They all have their own unique journeys and life stories, but they share a determination to become part of our community and to contribute to our shared future.

So to our new citizens we say congratulations and welcome to the best nation on earth!

We embrace you and your background and your energy and your ambition – and we invite you to embrace the notion of being Australian.

By prizing our values and way of life, you help us to be a better, richer and more diverse place.

I know many Australians want to balance our straightforward enjoyment of Australia Day with a more thoughtful reflection on our cultural and social journey, of problems still to be overcome and of distant goals yet to be met.

As a maturing and reflective nation this is as it should be – our strength comes from our capacity to openly acknowledge our past, to understand our differences, and to move ahead as one.

Australia Day is an occasion of unity – to be united in our gratitude for all of our advantages – and at the same time to be united in our determination to tackle inequity or injustice.

It is this unity and this openness that will help us create an even better Australia – for all Australians.

Today, also let us reflect on a number of special groups of Australians.

First, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – we owe so much to the original inhabitants of this land.

Let all Australians reflect on our ongoing obligation to nurture and respect the dignity and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians as an integral, pivotal part of our great Australian community.

And let’s ensure Australia Day is always a milestone on a hopeful journey.

Next, let us all congratulate that remarkable group of Australians who were this morning named in the Australia Day Honours List – so many everyday, brilliant people, whose service to the nation and to communities large and small is part of our
national greatness – part of who we are.

This is the 40th anniversary of Australia’s own independent honours system and if you know someone who has gone that extra mile to make a difference – community workers, carers, neighbours – why don’t you consider nominating them?

Australia has so many unsung heroes in many different fields, from all backgrounds and from all walks of life, and it is important they get the recognition they deserve.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that group of Australians who live today far from our shores – diplomats, aid workers, police, volunteers, teachers, even people touring and working abroad – and of course our marvellous men and women in uniform – sailors in their great grey ships, soldiers serving in faraway lands, and our air men and women working all around the world.

For them – for anyone far from their home in Australia – today has a special poignancy, and we send them our greetings and our hopes for their safe and speedy return to our shores.

Finally to all emergency service workers keeping us safe on this special day, and indeed every day – thank you. We deeply appreciate your professionalism and dedication.

Let me finish as I started – what a great day it is today!

Let it be the start of a wonderful year for the country we love – Australia.