

## **Australia Day Council (WA) - Auspire**

### **Inspiring Australians Breakfast - Australia Day Launch**

#### **Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC Governor of Western Australia**

**Tuesday, 21 January 2020**

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

It's satisfying to be here this morning as Patron of Auspire to celebrate and send off our four inspiring WA Australian of the Year recipients for 2020. Annie, John, Yarlalu and Suzy's journey started just next door in our Ballroom at the announcement event in November. In December, my wife Susie and I were delighted to welcome the group back to Government House to acknowledge their unique achievements and to better get to know them.

It has to be said that this Australia Day is a sombre day. We send off our recipients with a sense of achievement and triumph, always mixed with hope that they are adjudged favourably in Canberra. Now we look most to their representative character as West Australians who help the community cohere and progress. How we support each other. These attributes in our community shine through the fear, devastation and gloom of the unprecedented burning in our country.

The magnitude of the bushfire tragedy is significant.

- 29 people have perished in Australia this bushfire season [as at 20 January].
- Millions of acres have burned across the nation – dwarfing the Amazon fires in Brazil last year.
- Satellite images have shown smoke plumes covering an area equivalent in size to two-thirds of the Australian continent, drifting across the globe.
- Hundreds of millions of animals have perished, with Koalas seeing as much as 30 per cent of their habitat destroyed, and potentially at risk of becoming endangered in some areas.
- More than 2,500 homes full of sweet family memories lost.

Comforting words can do little to restore optimism in those who have been devastated.

We are however buoyed by many things:

- Tens of thousands of people rushing to become volunteer fire fighters to help their fellow Australians.
- The courageous efforts of our firefighters who have worked exhaustively to save many more buildings than the number lost. I understand that in NSW, regarded as the epicentre of the bushfire tragedy, for every home or facility lost in a bushfire ravaged area, another six are being saved.
- I am also heartened by donations nearing \$500 million through the generosity of Australians and others further afield too.

Just over a week ago I visited the Baldivis Volunteer Fire and Emergency Services Station which was being used as the Incident Control Centre for bushfires burning in areas across the Cities of Kwinana and Rockingham, and the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale. Speaking with the career and volunteer firefighters and DFES officials, I was deeply impressed by the coordination of departments in containing the blazes and the combined knowledge of the ground they fought on. More than 180 firefighters had worked tirelessly through the night to contain the blaze which burned through 1200 hectares. At the time I visited the next day, only one shed had been lost and no residential property – a great effort by all considering the fire’s 27km perimeter.

It has to be said out of Norseman our firies have been battling a more extensive fire and just yesterday are confronting another in our South West.

Make no mistake - the Australian character is world renowned; built on a foundation of genuine mateship and standing by our fellow Australians. Our country is made up of people from all over the world - some have been here for over 65,000 years, others for generations, and some newly arrived. Our nation’s story begins with the history of its Indigenous peoples. And there is no better time than our national day to reflect on that history, and the pivotal contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Our first Australians are testament to Australia’s resilience, as one of the oldest continuous cultures on earth, surviving and even thriving through dramatic climate events. The circumstances surrounding a recent story about cultural burning miraculously saving a man’s house in an utterly fire ravaged area are worth a closer look. As we come out of this tragedy, we need to demonstrate sufficient humility to discuss with Indigenous Australians how they manage and have for thousands of years. A discussion on enhancing the skills of rangers, who are already skilled in these areas and recruiting other fire fighters would be of value.

Let us not look too hard at who we can blame. Accountability is essential in times of crisis. More important is we focus on our ability to fight this crisis and to subsequently learn from it. We have a knack for this fight. We are blessed with people with a strong desire to help others, who make tremendous contributions to our ongoing prosperity. Blessed by those like the four inspiring West Australians we recognise and celebrate today. You help to form the fabric which makes Western Australian society, and indeed the nation, great.

Western Australia and our people are of exceptional importance to the nation, and increasingly so in these extraordinary times of global uncertainty. Contemplate this; WA is by far the largest contributor to Australia’s exports, our one State accounting for 35 per cent of the national total. We are the world’s great mineral province with some 21,030 mining tenements in force, and about one thousand mines either operating or under development. These sites include resources and expertise underpinning the green technologies the world urgently seeks now, and will need into the future. We work to not only improve our own society but advance others’ too, via world-leading work in fields as diverse as health research to space and automation.

I acknowledge also, the Australia Day Council WA for their considerable work helping to ensure that inspiring people in Western Australia and across the nation receive due recognition. Their Australia Day message that ‘We’re all part of the story’ of Australia is most befitting. As is the national mantra – ‘Reflect. Respect. Celebrate’.

The tradition of having Australia Day as a national holiday on 26 January is a recent one. Not until 1935 did all the Australian states and territories use this name to mark that date. And not until 1994 did we all begin to celebrate Australia Day consistently as a public holiday on that date.

Today, Australia Day is an event in which we come together. Event organisers throughout the nation increasingly engaging with Aboriginal leaders to seek advice on Aboriginal culture, protocols and participation in community activities resulting in the majority now conducting official Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Land ceremonies. Something which we can all be proud of.

Australia Day has evolved into a celebration of community and culture.

Those of us born here come away from these events with a renewed sense of belonging and affection. However different our lifestyles are, citizenship is one of the powerful rituals that bind us together as a community. As Australians, we share a many great things. We value freedom, we believe if you work hard you can achieve your dreams, we stick together in tough times (which has been particularly evident through the bushfire tragedies) and we believe in a fair go.

Today, being Australian means being 'what you want to be' and Australia Day celebrations are participatory rather than prescriptive. Despite ongoing debate about issues in Australian society which are important and necessary in a democracy, 98 per cent of Australians say they are proud to be Australian and proud of the values that characterise Australia.

Turning back to the Australian of the Year Awards – these have become synonymous with Australia Day since the early 1980s and the four category recipients are now announced each year by the Prime Minister on the eve of Australia Day, on the lawns of Parliament House.

Tomorrow [22 January 2020] our 2020 Australian of the Year recipients for Western Australia will travel to Canberra to represent us as national finalists where they will be welcomed by the National Australia Day Council, and attend events hosted by the Prime Minister and the Governor General.

Once again, we wish Annie Fogarty, John Newnham, Yarlalu Thomas and Suzy Urbaniak all the very best for the next stage of the Awards. We are extremely proud of them and their achievements. They inspire us, and we look forward to hearing the announcement of the National recipients later this week.

All the very best.