

City of Perth

Australia Day Citizenship and Awards Ceremony

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

Wednesday, 26 January 2022

***Check against delivery**

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

I thank Neville Collard for that stirring Welcome to Country that sets the respectful tone for today, and to Paula Parore for your beautiful singing.

Life giving river

Earlier this morning I addressed another group of Perth-lings – which is a new way in which locals of this City are described - just across this majestic river, the Derbal Yerrigan, in South Perth. It is pleasing and fitting that these local place names and the Noongar language are in regular use. Aboriginal languages are now being taught in more and more schools around the country. They always have been. In this State more than most. However, that approach is accelerating.

It is worth remembering that the Aboriginal people of this land have a direct connection to country that eclipses that of any other indigenous community on Earth. During my lifetime I have witnessed a maturing of how our people think of Aboriginal Australians to the point where there is great curiosity about, and pride in, their culture.

Aboriginal Australians are unique for their continuous connection to country dating back over 60,000 years. Most anthropologists will tell you oral memory goes back 7-to-800 years. Around the globe most societies have oral traditions. Some recent research has established the stories, songlines and myths of our coastal Aboriginal

population tracing back 7-13,000 years. 21 stories are reported from Aboriginal coastal communities. Geologically, they are dealing with areas gradually inundated as the last ice age ended. Examining the geological movements alongside the stories and deconstructed myths there is a clear correlation from all regions. They represent a 7-13,000 year old oral tradition at least.

Local stories about the Derbal Yerrigan feature strongly for our local communities. This river has been, and remains, so crucial to our City's development, sustaining life and linking people together.

When indulging my interest in Noongar culture I discovered that Derbal Yerrigan does not translate literally as 'Swan River', but as 'place of the fresh water turtle', or yarkan.

Lessons of the yarkan (turtle)

The turtle is a favoured and prized food source from ancient times, linked to health and long life. It was a favourite of Queen Victoria's (who loved turtle soup) and the turtle features strongly in local spirituality and mythology. For all of us, health and longevity are top of mind right now.

As many of you may know I once was involved in matters of national defence, and one of the intriguing and visually arresting aspects of turtles is their in-built self defence mechanism by which they hide from predators – part reptile, part tank!

Staying safe, protecting ourselves and hiding is an understandable response in times of trouble, but we need to be cautious about 'turtling' away from the unsettling realities that we now face.

Dangers of complacency

The enemy is at the gates now, and sooner or later we will open to the world and we cannot stem the tide of this virus completely.

Our front line soldiers in the hospitals, schools and nursing homes of our State are battle-weary after two hard years in the trenches.

They have recently had a reprieve. However, that is not a relax. It is not a situation we want. We need to be fully vaccinated. Above all, our kids need it. Delta was a threat to adults. Omicron is also, but particularly for kids, many of whom – after a mild first hit – a couple of months later experience a shut down. We need to play our part.

Difficult lessons have been learned in the last two years and we are feeling a shift in our strategic circumstance. Ever the 'lucky country', it has been easy to be Australians. Now it's going to be tough.

This crisis has taught us that serious mindedness is necessary, for our benefit and key to our survival.

Much has been asked and expected of our community, and we have lifted. The response has been inspiring and encouraging, and I thank each and every one of you who have done your part. In an increasingly dangerous world, we appreciate the men and women who stand in the shoes of earlier generations prepared to defend this nation.

Our State and our capital city - one that I know Lord Mayor Zempilas is keen to be known as "City of Light" - has been fortunate to capitalise on the wealth to our north.

We possess the world's greatest mineral province with precisely what is needed to develop new technologies. In the mining industry, many are being invested here. We can be proud of the same inventiveness in our agricultural community.

We must fund and support the bright minds who are developing new advances every day to maintain our quality of life and foster the innovations that will strengthen our economy.

We need brains and ingenuity to translate these natural assets into the goods and services that will secure our prosperity sustainably for the future.

It is our **people** will perform this alchemy, and Perth has a diversity that is unique among all Australian States. Of the 2.6 million people in Perth as a whole, over 36 per cent were born overseas or are from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Those who have joined us from across the seas, you have brought with you – along with the hopes and dreams of your families for a better life – skills, ideas, culture, and contacts that link us with the world.

Time to reconnect

For two years now as we battle COVID, we have felt the loss of those ties. There are empty seats at the dinner table that no amount of online catch ups or phone calls can fill. We have missed births, funerals, weddings and graduations. I feel particularly for the youngsters whose education has been impacted by this crisis.

As swiftly and safely as we can, **we need to reconnect**. We need to get people moving again – to fill thousands of vacant jobs, to patronise our local hospitality venues, here in Perth and beyond. We need to bring tourists back and we need to get out in great numbers to support our local artists, musicians and performers whose industry is struggling to survive.

I note that the Perth Fringe is underway, and it is one of many outstanding local cultural events that need our patronage.

Arts and culture are the lifeblood of our community, and we at Government House have tried to do our bit to assist by, among other things, opening up our gardens and ballroom to local creators and performers to hold space for them.

Grounded in nature

Not far from here, the gardens at Government House are thriving and are open to the public. As I reach the end of my term as Governor, I am reminded that we are mere custodians of that beautiful place.

It is a precious asset that belongs to all Western Australians and I encourage you to pay a visit to enjoy that green and precious oasis.

In anxious times like those we are living in now, connecting to nature **grounds** us. It reminds us of the preciousness and fragility of life, and we delight in seeing new things growing, giving us hope.

We are reassured by the cycling return of the seasons - we are now midway through the season of Birak and moving into Bunuru. There is so much we can learn from our Whadjuk brothers and sisters to live in greater harmony with this land. Having survived the hottest season ever, for our State this has never been more important.

Western Australia

I now want to speak directly to the new Australian and Western Australian citizens among us today. There has never been a better time to be a citizen, as pride in our city and in our State is at an all-time high. We continue to punch above our weight in so many areas.

Many who come here, either for a visit, or for good, notice how we are different. We are in a different time zone and our beaches are graced by a different ocean, over which the sun sets spectacularly each evening.

While I could wax lyrically about our exotic natural beauty, it is the **people** of this great State and City that are its heart. It is vital that our city and our State are safe, welcoming and inviting - a beacon of diversity.

In recent years we have leant in, banded together and shown the nation our compassion, resilience, and generosity of spirit. By working closely together we have

bred a population of 'sandgropers' who are rugged, determined and with a natural gift for innovation. We must overcome the voices of dissent and division among us to **unite** so that we can adapt to, and succeed in, this new world.

It is my great pleasure, as your Governor, to formally recognise you as citizens of Western Australia. Upon choosing WA to live, you have won a global lottery and got the golden ticket to live in the best place on Earth.

As good as it is, I challenge you to start thinking about what you do to make this place **even better**, and for an inspiring example you need look no further than the sterling work of our award recipients today.

What business will you start? What cultural tradition will you keep alive? What kind of citizens will the family you raise grow up to become? This State has much to share with you, and we are excited to see what you will do with it.

Conclusion

I formally welcome you all to Western Australia and Australia more broadly.

I particularly thank and congratulate recipients of awards presented in today's ceremony. You set a bright and inspiring example to our local communities.

Congratulations to you all. I wish you a safe and joyful Australia Day.