

Australia Day Council WA (Auspire)

Australia Day Launch

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

Friday, 21 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.

Introduction

I am honoured to once again be invited to join you here today to launch what I'm sure will be a wonderful week of Australia Day festivities.

Auspire does wonderful work in shining a light onto pockets of brilliance in our community. I had the great pleasure of spending time with this year's award recipients at Government House yesterday.

In the course of my very pleasant and engaging duties as Governor, I regularly meet the most extraordinary people, who give generously of their time to make our State of Western Australia a rich and vibrant place.

We need inspiration right now. There is a lot of doom and gloom around us at the minute. Watching the news on any given day can leave us feeling anxious and concerned for our future. Matters of health are deep in our collective consciousness.

The antidote to this anxiety can, to an extent, be found by following the inspiring example set by these wonderful people and their good works. I wish our WA award recipients well and best of luck for the national judging – you carry the pride and grateful thanks of your home State with you.

The theme for this week's Australia Day commemoration is reflect, respect, celebrate and it seems to me that the order of these words is right.

Reflect

No reflection on Australia Day, and on what it means to be Australian, and Western Australian, can begin without a clear-eyed assessment of our past, which does not always make for comfortable reading in terms of the treatment our first nations' peoples received and sadly still experience today. This date causes mixed feelings for some and provokes hurt for others.

As we gear up to write another chapter in the story of our State and celebrate all that has been achieved since European settlement, it is right to remember that this wealth and prosperity and development came at a painfully high price for the Noongar nation, and for other Aboriginal nations in W.A.

As a father and grandfather I have read many stories to my little ones over the years, and it is a charming similarity they all have in wanting to skip some parts and fast forward to the exciting bits.

As we explore the story of our State, we must resist the desire to gloss over the difficult chapters, and to read the tough parts of our story with the same commitment as we revel in our achievements. These painful accounts are now only being properly understood with hindsight, with the application of science and rigour, and a better appreciation of the impact of cross-generational trauma and its legacy.

There is much work still to do in addressing the past and providing fair opportunities for the future.

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. Original place names are being used.

Their languages are 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.

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.

Aboriginals have so much to teach us. Local and long-standing practices for the management of our lands, forests and waterways are only now – and far too late – being studied, learned and applied.

We are only just beginning this exploration and I am greatly encouraged by the open-eyed and open-hearted way the younger generation embrace and enjoy this discovery. We need open minds and hearts and hands if we are to ever heal the hurts of the past and move forward together in a genuine reconciliation to chart a truly shared future.

Respect

From reflect we move to **respect**. It has been observed that without justice there can be no peace, and equally, without respect there can be no meaningful connections made or conversations held.

In our civil society, which at times is plagued by incivility, especially lately, we must approach discussions of important issues with tolerance and patience and this can be extremely challenging where views are increasingly fractured and polarised.

Differences of opinion and public demonstrations in response to recent health advice and vaccinations are tugging at old threads of distrust in public institutions. Australians have ever been a rebellious bunch – it is part of our national D-N-A.

Here in Western Australia this can be found in the pioneering and adventurous nature of our people, who chose to live **here** – far from their

origins and far even from their fellow Australians. They found freedom and opportunity in this vast majestic land.

We like to go our own way, and do things in our own style. Being independent, resourceful and innovative for Western Australians is as natural as breathing. However, we face a danger in pulling too hard on the strings of discord at the risk of pulling the fabric of our society apart.

Expressing views, even dissenting views, is healthy. It is the cornerstone of a modern and sophisticated democracy. Sadly, the media who are the long-time champions of diversity of thought, who verify facts and sources and who serve a vital purpose in keeping public figures to account, are under siege. Their authority, funding and access – their very legitimacy – is under attack as we have never seen.

We are still adapting to the changes in our media landscape that have profound implications. Social media can be very helpful in connecting and sharing with others – even we at Government House share our content on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

It is wonderful for me to be able to reach out to the people directly in this way to highlight important issues and to inspire them with the example of wonderful people like those being recognised here today.

For all of its benefits, social media can also lead vulnerable minds down dark paths into echo chambers where the most sensationalist and hateful thoughts are shared and espoused as ‘truths’. It can be challenging for the vulnerable to exercise discernment amid this cacophony.

There was a time, not that long ago, when we all read the same newspapers and consumed the same TV and radio programmes.

Now we are splintered into subgroups consuming a bewildering array of content and we are losing that shared cultural context.

The urgent need for finding a **respectful balance** between freedom and responsibility is upon us, and our regulatory agencies are doing hardscrabble in this space but only playing catch up. They are out staffed and out funded by these mammoth new publishers who are operating in a more or less unregulated new media sphere.

Respect is essential for having difficult conversations. We need respect for our workers in essential and emergency services and for our health professionals.

Respect for our teachers who are doing their best but disconnected from their students. Respect for the rule of law and due process. Respect for public institutions and leaders at all levels. We watched with horror a year ago what happened in the American capital when respect for their home of governance was lost and Australia cannot and must not go this way.

As I watched that appalling effort trying to overthrow that great democracy, I could only be grateful that they were completely incompetent. Counting resumed as these malicious folk were moved out.

I thought something else as well, and with pride as well as fear. Without doubt, we lead the world in democratic practice and none of us know it. In recent times, it stems from the Electoral Act of 1984. That established a genuinely independent election commission and removed the rorting

from distributions, redistributions, early voting, ballot paper information, resourcing.

It was a product back then of a decision by Labor and Liberal machine men and women who found themselves in Parliament. They determined on mutual disarmament for the good of democracy.

Largely not only the population but parliamentarians have forgotten this moment and that spirit. It needs reviving and teaching.

Respecting the enemy

It is well known in the field of battle that we underestimate our enemy at our peril and right now, this pandemic is the greatest health enemy we have ever faced. In the war on COVID-19, the Western Australian regiment has performed brilliantly, and I salute you.

I thank every single Western Australian who has lifted in this crisis. You have set the example for the nation, and indeed the world, in adapting to our new circumstance. The enemy is at the gates now, it is not long before 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 had, as of last night, 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.

This is the greatest public health challenge of our age, and now is not the time to bask in past success. There is too much at stake. By being respectful of each other, we can work together and pull through this.

Celebrate?

Where in this context can we find room to celebrate?

We can be proud of how well we have fared so far and celebrate each other and what makes us unique.

We can be thankful for our relative peace and security and work hard to maintain it.

We can applaud our fellow Western Australians and be inspired by their example, as we do with these awards. I congratulate everyone here today for their achievements and the contribution you have made.

We can fund and support the bright minds who are developing new advances every day to maintain our quality of life.

We can foster the innovations that will strengthen our economy.

We can reflect on the fact that we are the world's greatest mineral province with precisely what is needed for new technologies. In the mining industry, many are being invested here. We can be proud of the same inventiveness in our agricultural community.

In an increasingly dangerous world, we can appreciate the men and women who stand in the shoes of earlier generations prepared to defend this nation.

We can invest in our schools and universities to guide the bright young minds who will help us grow sustainably for the future in exciting new directions.

And in great Western Australian tradition, we can **back ourselves**.

History recalls that adversity is a wonderful teacher, providing the sandbox where creativity and ingenuity can flourish. We have already seen this – to use just one example, a local distillery that was set to launch in 2019 was able to pivot and use their new plant and equipment to manufacture hand sanitiser which has become a hot commodity.

We possess great natural wealth. In the renewable energy sector we have all the sun, wind, tide and land you could ever need to power not just our State but the world.

Let's celebrate all that we have, all that we have achieved, and use that to propel us forward for an even brighter future.