COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION (CPA) RECEPTION FOR THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE 41ST CPA AUSTRALIA AND PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE

REMARKS BY

HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS

GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA

GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WEDNESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2026

VICE-REGAL SALUTE

Good evening, everyone, and a very warm welcome to Government House for the closing ceremony of the 41st Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Australia and Pacific Regional Conference.

It is a pleasure to have you all here with us this evening, and to welcome parliamentary representatives and colleagues from across Australia and the Pacific to Tasmania.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Palawa people, the First Peoples of lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather this evening.

For countless generations, the Palawa people have cared for this island — its landscapes, its waterways and its communities. Their connection to this place is enduring, and I feel fortunate to be able to live here.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal people joining us this evening. Your continuing contribution to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State is deeply valued.

Today, of course, is 11 November — Remembrance Day. At 11 o'clock this morning, people across Australia and throughout the Commonwealth paused for a minute's silence to remember those who lost their lives in the First World War and in subsequent conflicts.

This morning, Rob and I attended the commemorations at the Hobart Cenotaph, as I believe some of you did as well.

There is something particularly poignant about bringing a conference on the future of parliamentary democracy to a close on Remembrance Day. We remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of our freedoms, including the freedom to participate in the democratic institutions that we sometimes take for granted.

It is a timely reminder that democracy is not simply something we inherit. It is something we must value, protect and continually strengthen.

We have a wonderful gathering of Tasmanian, Australian and international parliamentarians and distinguished guests here this evening. Rather than risk overlooking anyone in individual acknowledgements, may I simply say that you are all warmly welcomed, and it is a pleasure to have you here.

As we celebrate the conclusion of the conference, I hope you have enjoyed your time in Tasmania. I also hope that, alongside the important work of the past two days, you have had an opportunity to experience something of what makes our island so special — its extraordinary natural beauty, its rich cultural heritage and, perhaps most importantly, the warmth of its people.

I must confess that, without a political background myself, I was interested to learn more about the history and work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

I discovered that the Association began life as the Empire Parliamentary Association before adopting its present name in 1948, reflecting the changing nature of the Commonwealth. Today, it has 187 branches across 54 Commonwealth countries, representing approximately 17,000 members[1].

That is an extraordinary network, bringing together people with different histories, cultures, political systems and experiences, but with a shared commitment to parliamentary democracy.

At its heart, the CPA is about building understanding — learning from one another, exchanging ideas and strengthening the institutions that underpin good governance. Its work promotes the principles of transparency, accountability, respect for the rule of law and the fundamental importance of democratic representation.

I understand those principles have been very much at the heart of the discussions you have shared over the past two days.

This year is particularly significant for Tasmania, as we mark the bicentenary of our Legislative Council.

When the Council first met in April 1826, it did so behind closed doors at the old Government House near Franklin Square. It comprised just six men, appointed directly by the Lieutenant-Governor, with no accountability to the people who lived here.

How things have changed! Our parliamentary institutions have travelled a considerable distance since those beginnings.

[1] https://cpaaus.org/

Progress, however, was not always straightforward. In 1845, six members walked out of the Council rather than support taxes they considered unjust. They became known as the 'Patriotic Six'.

Their story is a reminder that democratic institutions do not simply evolve of their own accord. They depend on people prepared to question, to challenge, to stand by their principles and, when necessary, to seek change[2].

Two hundred years on, that remains just as relevant.

The three themes of your conference — Integrity, Innovation and Inclusion — speak directly to that continuing responsibility. They are not simply conference themes; they are essential ingredients of a healthy and resilient democracy[3].

I was particularly interested in the discussions about integrity and good governance, and the relationship between these principles and public trust.

Trust is something that parliamentary institutions must continually earn. It cannot simply be assumed or demanded.

People need to know that decisions made on their behalf are transparent, evidence-based, free from improper influence and genuinely directed towards the public interest. They need to see that those entrusted with public responsibility are accountable for their actions.

I am told that the first day's program included a panel discussion led by the heads of Tasmania's independent oversight bodies. I am sure the discussion reinforced the important role these organisations play in safeguarding the integrity of parliamentary processes and maintaining public confidence in our institutions.

---

[2] https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Patriotic%206.htm accessed 4 Nov 26

[3] https://conferences.com.au/2026-cpa/#program

Of course, maintaining that confidence is not without its challenges.

The digital age has brought enormous opportunities for communication and engagement, but it has also created new pressures and risks for those who serve in public life. Recent events in Victoria and elsewhere remind us that public office can come with a very real personal cost.

It is important to remember that parliamentarians are people first. They are individuals with families, friendships and lives beyond their public responsibilities. They have chosen to undertake an important and often demanding role on behalf of their communities, and they should be able to do so without fear of intimidation, abuse or threats to their personal safety.

Respectful debate and robust scrutiny are essential to democracy. But neither should ever come at the expense of basic respect for the people involved.

This brings me to the third theme of your conference — Inclusion.

A strong democracy must do more than represent its community in theory. It must make room for the full diversity of that community to be heard, to participate and to contribute.

When our parliaments better reflect the people they serve, they bring a wider range of experiences, perspectives and ideas to the decisions that shape our shared future.

Inclusion is not simply about who has a seat at the table. It is also about ensuring that every voice has the opportunity to be heard and taken seriously.

And when integrity, innovation and inclusion work together, our democratic institutions are better placed to meet the challenges of the future and maintain the confidence of the communities they serve.

Before I close, I would like to make one exception to my earlier approach to acknowledgements and recognise a very special achievement by one of Tasmania's own parliamentarians.

Earlier this year, the Honourable Ruth Forrest MLC was announced as the 2026 Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year.

This is a wonderful achievement, and one of which Tasmania can be very proud.

As the award citation recognised, Ruth's contribution to 'public accountability, evidence-based scrutiny and inclusive leadership within the Tasmanian Parliament and across the Commonwealth'[4] has been exceptional.

Ruth, congratulations. It is a pleasure to acknowledge your achievement here this evening, in the company of your parliamentary colleagues from across the region.

As this conference draws to a close, I hope you leave Tasmania not only with new ideas and insights, but also with new friendships, strengthened professional connections and a renewed sense of the shared responsibility we all have in sustaining parliamentary democracy.

Our countries and communities may be different, and our parliamentary systems may have their own histories and traditions, but the values that bring us together are remarkably consistent.

Ultimately, democracy depends on people — people willing to serve, to listen, to question, to work together and to act in the interests of others.

[4] https://www.cpahq.org/news/2026_09-parliamentarian-of-the-year-awards/

Thank you for the contribution you have made to this conference and for the important work you do in your respective parliaments and communities.

Please enjoy the reception and Rob and I look forward to meeting and speaking with you more informally throughout the evening.

It has been a pleasure to welcome you to Tasmania, and we wish you all a safe journey home.

Thank you.