RECEPTION TO MARK THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE STORY ISLAND PROJECT
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, THURSDAY 29 OCTOBER 2026

Good evening, everyone. I am so pleased to welcome you all to Government House as we celebrate 10 years of The Story Island Project.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Palawa people as the First Peoples of Lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of the land we're gathered on today.

For countless generations, they have cared for this island, its landscapes, its waterways and its communities, and I'm grateful to be able to live here.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to any Aboriginal people with us today. Your continuing contribution to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State is deeply valued.

Tonight we are here to celebrate not only an important milestone for your organisation, but also the creativity of our youngest Tasmanians.

For the past decade Story Island has been helping our young people to harness the power of their imaginations so they can grow to be resilient, creative shapers of their own lives.

You have done this by nurturing writing skills through dynamic, in-school storytelling workshops in communities of disadvantage around greater Hobart.

These workshops have engaged young people in writing and illustrating their own unique stories, with the support of Story Island's specialist staff and volunteer mentors.

At the end of each program, the young people's stories are brought to life, professionally transcribed and published in a printed book, giving every student the wonderful opportunity to become a published author. What an inspiring achievement! Seeing their own words in print is a powerful celebration of their imagination, creativity and unique voices.

For students who may find reading and writing challenging, this experience can be truly transformative, nurturing confidence, fostering a sense of pride and helping them discover that their stories matter and their voices deserve to be heard.

While Story Island may today be an emerging leader in the Tasmanian arts sector, a decade ago it was just an idea shared by two Hobart women over a kitchen table.

Co-founders Emily Bullock and Kate Gross were inspired by the model of San Francisco's 826 Valencia, a creative writing organisation supporting young people to tell their stories through fun, engaging programs that publish participants' work.

Emily and Kate worked together to translate this vision into a Tasmanian context, establishing an organisation that helped bridge the gap between our celebrated literary sector and our State's low levels of functional literacy, which, at 48 per cent, are among the lowest in the nation.

As Governor, I feel strongly that supporting literacy must remain a priority for our State. The ability to read, understand and engage with the written word opens doors to opportunity, nurtures curiosity and enables people to participate more fully in their communities.

It is particularly concerning that so many Tasmanians continue to face barriers to functional literacy. I believe we have a collective responsibility to address this challenge, ensuring that every Tasmanian, regardless of their circumstances, has the opportunity to develop the skills and confidence that literacy brings.

It is this belief in the importance of literacy, and in the need to make the written word accessible to all, that lies at the heart of the Story Island Project. Established in 2016, the Project has spent the past decade bringing the joy and power of stories to children and young people, working across 50 schools and community centres and reaching more than 1,600 students in areas of need around Hobart.

Staying true to Kate and Emily's first inspiration, Story Island has also published 38 unique books and anthologies, containing thousands of student stories, and has gifted the books back to all these students.

As we reflect on the achievements of the past ten years this evening, may we particularly keep in mind those 1,600 plus young Tasmanians who have trusted Story Island with their imaginations, their ideas and their stories. Their voices are at the heart of everything the organisation does.

Tonight is an opportunity to not only celebrate what has been achieved, but also to recognise the people who made it possible, and to look with optimism towards what comes next.

Story Island exists and endures due to the passion, skill and commitment of an exceptional community of people, many of whom are here this evening. They have all invested their time and energy to make a meaningful difference in the lives of young Tasmanians.

May I particularly acknowledge Story Island's Board, led by Chair, Theo Kapodistrias, and its team led by General Manager, Dr Astrid Wootton, for their leadership and commitment to the organisation, together with the current and former Board members, staff and volunteers who have helped Story Island grow and flourish.

I also acknowledge the teachers, schools, donors, partners and supporters who have opened doors, given generously and championed Story Island's work over the past decade.

While Story Island receives core funding from Arts Tasmania and project funding from the Australian Government through Creative Australia, I also acknowledge the community which has provided vital financial support through donations, bequests, foundations and business sponsorship to enable the organisation to undertake its work.

Finally, I congratulate all involved with Story Island on reaching this milestone.

There are thousands of young people around our State whose stories are still waiting to be told, and who are still to experience the pride and joy of becoming published authors.

May Story Island continue to inspire and encourage young Tasmanians to strengthen their literacy skills, discover the joy of reading, share their stories and find their voices for many years to come.

Thank you, and please enjoy your reception.