



**ROYAL HUMANE SOCIETY OF AUSTRALASIA  
INVESTITURE CEREMONY  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
LATROBE MEMORIAL HALL, THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2026**

Thank you, Mayor Freshney, for that warm welcome.

I too pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to the strength and courage of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, as we recognise bravery in our community.

It is a pleasure to be here as Patron of the Royal Humane Society, and particularly relevant that we are here in Latrobe, ten years after a flood that changed this community forever.

As you have heard, In June 2016, the Mersey rose with extraordinary speed and force. Water entered homes, paddocks and the heart of this town. Three Tasmanians lost their lives: Mary Allford here in Latrobe, Trevor Foster at Ouse, and Peter Watson, from Scottsdale.

All the evidence made it very clear that the flood event in which Mary died was, in fact, the worst to impact Latrobe since the early 1900s. The river level measurements of a number of Tasmanian rivers, including the Mersey, were the highest ever recorded and exceeded all predictions for the levels of floods at the time.

These were terrible days and we remember those who lost their lives and we hold their families in our thoughts.

Ten years is long enough for the mud to be gone and the fences rebuilt, but it will never be long enough to forget what happened. And perhaps that is one of the most important things about today: that while the physical traces may fade with time, our memories do not.

The Royal Humane Society has spent more than 150 years recognising people who put themselves at risk to help others, with over 8,500 awards being presented over that time.

But bravery is not simply about extraordinary individuals. It is about our humanity — the instinct to help another person when they need us most.

The question, in those moments, is very simple: do I turn away, or do I go towards?

Today, three recipients will receive the Clarke Gold Medal, the Royal Humane Society of Australasia's highest honour for the most outstanding act of bravery. Two further recipients, local council employees who assisted in the rescue effort, will receive Bronze Medals.

These medals represent a moment when individuals refused to give up on other people. They represent humanity expressed through action. They remind us that saving a life has impacts that extend far beyond a single person.

When somebody is brought safely home, a family retains a husband, wife, parent, sibling or grandparent. Friends retain someone they love. A community retains one of its own. This is humanity in action.

For recipients, families and communities these awards provide an opportunity to acknowledge what occurred, to reflect upon lives saved and lives lost, and to honour the people who stepped forward when they were needed. Recognition can become part of remembrance and, I hope, part of healing. It can also inspire others.

The citations that will shortly be read describe exceptional acts of courage and bravery. To the recipients being honoured today: your actions speak to the very best qualities of service, courage and humanity.

Your story reminds us that courage is rarely the work of one person. A rescue is a chain, and every link matters.

That is why it is so fitting that we are here in Latrobe today. This community knows resilience.

Ten years ago, people opened their homes, brought food and clothing, and put on boots and gloves to help their neighbours rebuild. Some rescued people from floodwater and others helped in so many different ways in the days, months and years that followed.

Different acts, different kinds of courage — but the same instinct: to look after one another. If you helped this community in 2016, in whatever way, know that today's recognition is shared with you.

We do not know when we may be called upon to help someone else. But we can hope that, when that moment comes, we will have the courage to go forward, just like our recipients today and all those in the Latrobe community.

Thank you.