



**WOMEN CHIEFS OF ENTERPRISES INTERNATIONAL
2026 NATIONAL FORUM
OPENING ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
ROYAL YACHT CLUB OF TASMANIA, FRIDAY 14 AUGUST 2026**

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to beautiful Nipaluna/Hobart.

It is a pleasure to be here with you and a privilege to open the Women Chiefs of Enterprises International 2026 National Forum.

Thank you, Miriam, for that wonderful introduction and for the Acknowledgement of Country.

I too pay my respects to Elders past and present and particularly recognise the enduring contribution of Aboriginal women to the cultural, social, business and spiritual life of Tasmania.

It is wonderful to see so many women gathered here — women building businesses, leading organisations, creating opportunities, solving problems and creating pathways for those who will follow.

WCEI has been doing this work for more than four decades. Founded in Australia by Dr Noel Waite AO, WCEI exists to mentor, support and inspire women in business.

And there is something powerful about a network like this.

Leadership can sometimes be portrayed as an individual pursuit — the entrepreneur with the vision, the leader who took the risk, the innovator who made it happen.

But very little of lasting value is achieved alone.

We need people who challenge us, encourage us, facilitate introductions and sometimes simply say: *I believe you can do this.*

That spirit of connection and collaboration is at the heart of WCEI.

It is also why I was so drawn to this year's theme: Audacious Coherence.

Audacity speaks to courage and ambition — the willingness to think bigger, ask for more and pursue what may seem impossible.

Coherence is about alignment — ensuring our values, our vision and our actions belong together.

For me, that has particular resonance as I begin my role as Governor of Tasmania.

When you take on a role such as Governor, there is a temptation to think first about the office, the responsibilities and the expectations.

But for me, the more important question is: How do I best fulfill the role and make a difference?

I have said that I want to lead, with compassion, kindness and purpose. And I want to do that authentically, because I believe leadership is most powerful when it is grounded in who we are.

To me, authenticity means knowing what matters to you and having the courage to let those values guide how you act.

That is coherence: when what you say is reflected in what you do.

As Governor, I see my role through four interconnected pillars.

The first is Constitutional — as the representative of our Head of State, King Charles III, fulfilling the responsibilities of the office with integrity, impartiality and respect for our democratic institutions, and safeguarding the orderly functioning of government and Parliament.

The second is Ceremonial — representing Tasmania at moments of celebration, commemoration and significance; recognising achievement and honouring service and marking the moments that shaped our shared history.

The third is Connecting Communities.

This is especially important to me. Tasmania is a state of extraordinary communities, each with its own character and stories. I will be listening, learning and travelling across the State, connecting with Tasmanians from every part of our community.

And the fourth, which I have instigated as a new pillar, is Championing Tasmania.

I believe Tasmania has an extraordinary story to tell. We should be proud of our people, our businesses, our innovation, our creativity, our natural environment and the contribution Tasmanians make nationally and internationally.

This pillar is about promoting Tasmania's strengths by supporting opportunities that enhance the State's reputation, visitor economy and economic growth, through areas such as trade and investment.

It means celebrating what we do exceptionally well, supporting those who are creating opportunities and encouraging people to see Tasmania not simply as that

place at the bottom of Australia, but as a place of ideas, ambition, possibility and influence.

These pillars are different, but they are connected.

And I want each of them to be grounded in the values I have articulated: compassion, kindness, purpose and authenticity.

People don't just listen to what leaders say — they watch what we do.

They notice how we treat people. Whether we listen and when we disagree. Whether we make space for different perspectives. Whether our ambition creates opportunities for others.

Sometimes kindness can sound soft in a leadership context, as though it is the opposite of strength.

I don't believe that is the case.

Kindness can require enormous strength. Compassion asks us to listen before we judge, to understand before we respond, and to recognise that everyone is carrying a story we may know very little about.

And leadership is ultimately about people.

Businesses are about people. Communities are about people. Institutions are about people.

That is why my approach as Governor is to put people at the centre — to listen, connect, celebrate achievement and encourage Tasmanians to believe in what is possible.

That does not mean avoiding difficult conversations. Compassion can make difficult conversations better. Kindness does not mean lowering standards. Purpose does not mean having all the answers. And authenticity does not mean refusing to change.

These qualities give us a foundation to lead with both courage and humility.

And that brings me back to your three themes at the heart of your Forum:

- Build with intelligence
- Lead with integrity
- Define with intention

They are powerful principles for business, but also for leadership more broadly.

Build with intelligence. Be curious. Embrace new ideas, technology and creativity. But ask: *Why are we building this? Who is it for? And what impact will it have?*

Lead with integrity. Our values can be tested when decisions are difficult and when doing the right thing comes at a cost.

Define with intention. Ask yourself: *What matters to me? What kind of leader do I want to be? What do I want to contribute?*

And then ask the most important question: *Am I living consistently with those answers?*

Women in business have a particularly important role to play.

When women succeed, the benefits extend far beyond the individual. Businesses create jobs and innovation. They strengthen communities.

And women who build successful enterprises create something incredibly valuable: possibility.

They show other woman what might be possible. They particularly show a young girl that she too can be a leader. They mentor, employ, invest, advocate and create pathways for those who come next.

That is why forums like this matter — not only for the ideas we exchange, but for the relationships we build.

There is something deeply fitting about WCEI's values finding a home here in Tasmania, because what it means to be a Tasmanian woman is, in many ways, what it means to be a WCEI member: it is to know both the specialness and the hardship of a place, and to meet both with honesty and courage.

We don't shy away from our challenges here, we embrace them, we nurture the opportunities within them, and to us our achievements mean more because of it. That is the pattern of Tasmanian success, and it is written into the stories of women across our State.

It is also, I think, exactly what this room represents today; a shared legacy of perseverance, connection, and purpose, carried by the women who understand that success extends beyond professional achievement to the strength, audacity, and determination it takes to build something lasting and meaningful for the communities we belong to.

So I encourage you to be audacious.

Ask the big question. Challenge an assumption. Share the idea you have been holding back. Make the introduction. Offer the support. Think bigger than you did yesterday.

But alongside that audacity, hold onto coherence.

Know your values. Know your purpose. And make sure the way you lead is consistent with both.

The most compelling leaders are not necessarily the loudest people in the room. They are the people whose actions give credibility to their words — who make others feel seen, create confidence in others, and hold ambition and empathy in the same hand.

Perhaps that is the opportunity in Audacious Coherence: to be bold without losing our humanity; ambitious without losing our integrity; to embrace change without losing ourselves; and to lead with courage while remaining kind.

As Governor, that is the kind of leadership I hope to bring to this role — grounded in compassion, kindness, purpose and authenticity, and expressed through my four pillars of Constitutional responsibility, Ceremonial representation, Connecting Communities and Championing Tasmania.

To all of you here today, thank you for the leadership you already provide and for creating a community in which women can support women to be audacious — and to do so with purpose.

May your conversations be courageous.

May your connections be generous.

May your ideas be bold.

And may what you build together have an impact well beyond this room.

It is my great pleasure to officially open the Women Chiefs of Enterprises International, 2026 National Forum.