



**MORNING TEA TO MARK THE
TASMANIAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT 2026
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WEDNESDAY 22 JULY 2026**

Good morning, everyone, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to Government House as we celebrate all the work you are doing as part of the Tasmanian Youth Parliament 2026.

I acknowledge the Palawa people as the First Peoples of lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of this land. For countless generations, they have cared for and nurtured this remarkable island, its landscapes, waterways and communities.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present and recognise the enduring contribution of Aboriginal Tasmanians to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State.

Firstly, I'd like to congratulate you all for putting your hands up to be part of this important initiative. The opportunity to develop your advocacy skills, your understanding of democratic processes, and knowledge of local and global political issues is so important. Plus, the opportunity to connect with your peers across the State cannot be under estimated and I am sure many of these new friendships will continue.

As you learn about our parliamentary system, I am pleased that you have come to Government House to learn about my role, the role of the Governor. Only recently coming into this role, I have been very surprised about varying

levels of understanding in the community about our democratic processes and how, for example, I was appointed. This is certainly not a role that you apply for!

Today, I'd like to share my four pillars of work of how I am delivering my role as the 30th Governor of Tasmania:

1. Constitutional – which is where we will spend the majority of our time today.
2. Ceremonial – the Governor has a significant ceremonial role and officiates at many important ceremonies, including the Opening of Parliament and Investitures for the Order of Australia and other service and bravery awards. The Governor speaks at important events such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.
3. Connecting Communities – this is a significant and important part of the role. Meeting people and hearing their stories and shining a light on all the amazing people here in Tasmania who do so many amazing things is a key part of the role of Governor.
4. Championing Tasmania – this is a new pillar of the role and although this work formed part of the Governor's remit previously, I wanted to raise the profile of this work. This 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.

However, today I will concentrate on the constitutional part of my role as that is an important part of the work you are undertaking. So, let's get started!

Appointment of the Governor

The Governor is appointed by The King on the advice of the Premier.

The Governor's term of appointment is generally five years. A really important thing to remember is that the Governor is independent and apolitical. In fact, the Governor can seek a dispensation to vote, so it is truly apolitical.

The Governor is The King's representative in Tasmania and exercises His powers and functions, except for the power to appoint and terminate the appointment of the Governor, or when His Majesty is personally present in the State.

These powers and functions are done in accordance with advice from the Premier and other Ministers.

The King, therefore, does not play a day-to-day role in the government of Tasmania. As his representative in Tasmania, I will be fortunate to have an audience with The King in Buckingham Palace during my term of office.

The Governor also acts in accordance with the advice of the Premier and other Ministers, except in exceptional circumstances, or when exercising a reserve power, which I shall talk about shortly.

In regard to my appointment, the Premier telephoned me and we had a discussion about how I felt about taking on the role. That's one phone call I won't ever forget! It's certainly not a role that you apply for and it is a great honour and very much a role of service.

As part of my swearing -in, I received my Commission which was signed by both the Premier and King Charles III. I will leave it on the piano so you can have a look.

So, let's dive more deeply into the Constitutional part of the role of the Governor.

The Governor's primary role is constitutional:

Firstly, as the protector of parliamentary democracy and responsible government;

Second, as part of the Parliament; and

Third, as Chair of the Executive Council.

As a protector of parliamentary democracy and responsible government, the Governor has reserve powers.

These are discretionary powers that may be used to uphold and maintain the fundamental constitutional principles of our system of government.

Professor Anne Twomey, an Australian academic and lawyer specialising in Australian constitutional law, states in her book, *The Veiled Sceptre* that, “the head of state is not only the symbolic guardian of the ...Constitution, but the one person with powers of last resort reserved for its protection.”

Reserve powers include:

- the power to appoint and dismiss premiers; and
- the power to dissolve or to refuse to dissolve the House of Assembly.

The exercise of reserve powers is often not noticed, as well-established conventions govern reserve powers. It is only when a constitutional crisis arises that their existence becomes notable.

After a general election, it is usually a straightforward matter for the Governor to ask the leader of the party with a majority of members to form a government. However, it becomes more difficult if the election result is a hung parliament, where no political party wins a majority of seats. As you know, this is becoming a more common scenario, and some would say

minority government is more likely to be an ongoing situation. The convention is for the Governor to appoint as Premier the person who holds, or is most likely to hold, the confidence of the Lower House.

The previous Governor, the Honourable Barbara Baker, had to exercise reserve power in respect of the calling of the most recent Tasmanian election, when a no-confidence motion was made against the Premier, by the Leader of the Opposition. This motion was carried.

This meant that the Premier requested the Governor to prorogue Parliament and dissolve the House of Assembly so that an election could be held. The Governor had to consider whether to grant or refuse the request.

As part of this consideration, the Governor took into account:

- that an election had been held in March 2024 (the House of Assembly has a four-year term).
- importantly, whether an alternative government could be formed by the Opposition party (with 10 members) with the support of other members, which would avoid an election. If an alternative government were not possible, the House would not be able to function, and there would be no choice but to dissolve the House. As part of this consideration, the Governor interviewed both Mr Rockliff and Mr Winter.

The Governor concluded that there was no possibility of an alternative government and so granted Mr Rockliff's request for an election.

The Governor has to make sure that a Government is formed and that it will have the confidence of the House.

The fact that decisions have to go through the Governor is a protection against illegal or unconstitutional acts.

The second constitutional aspect of the Governor's role is as part of the Parliament:

As you are all aware, it is our Parliament that enacts laws known as Acts of Parliament. Before a Bill becomes an Act of Parliament, it must be passed by both Houses and given the Royal Assent by the Governor.

I am given the Bills and the Second Reading speech several days before I give Royal Assent. This gives me time to consider them. As Governor, I can ask questions or seek clarification from the relevant Minister about a Bill before I give assent to it.

As part of the Parliament, the Governor also summons the Parliament to sit and dissolves the House of Assembly for elections.

The third constitutional aspect of the role is to preside over meetings of the Executive Council:

The Premier and the Ministers form the Executive Council. The *Council* is the supreme executive authority in Tasmania and gives legal effect to regulations, proclamations, and appointments of judges, magistrates, and senior government officials. These are approved by the Governor on and with the advice of the Executive Council.

It is the Governor's role to ensure that the processes of the Executive Council are conducted lawfully and regularly. I chair the meetings of the Executive Council.

I can ask questions and seek further information from Ministers before formally approving regulations and appointments. An item on the agenda can be postponed while further information or documentation is obtained, or the item can be withdrawn.

As you can see, the powers vested in the Governor are quite significant and all Governors take this responsibility very seriously, but it is such an important part of safeguarding our democracy.

Congratulations to everyone involved and to the volunteer co-convenors, Ali, Emily and Lucien. You have given much of your time to make this year's Youth Parliament of 50 participants such a success.

Best wishes to you all for your future endeavors and maybe that may mean some role in our parliamentary system.

So now, please enjoy the morning tea and I look forward to talking with you.

Thank you.