



**TASMANIAN LEADERS INC
RECEPTION TO CELEBRATE THE
2026 I-LEAD YOUNG PROFESSIONALS PROGRAM
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2026**

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to Government House as we celebrate the participants of the 2026 I-LEAD Young Professionals program, and more broadly, our amazing Tasmanian leaders. Supporting leadership and mentoring is close to my heart, and I am genuinely delighted to share this evening with you.

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the Palawa people as the First Peoples of Lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today.

For countless generations, Aboriginal Tasmanians have cared for and nurtured this remarkable island — its lands, 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.

Thank you all for being here tonight to celebrate something truly worth celebrating — leadership in Tasmania. To the 2026 graduates of I-LEAD Young Professionals, our congratulations. To your mentors, employers, families and friends, and to the wider Tasmanian Leaders network, thank you for sharing this evening with them.

I-LEAD Young Professionals is now in its third year, and with this group graduating, the program will have supported seventy-seven emerging leaders from right across Tasmania — seventy-seven people who have chosen, quite deliberately, to invest in themselves and in their ability to lead others well. When I think about that number, and about the calibre of people in this room tonight, I come away with a very clear sense that Tasmania's future leadership is in safe hands.

I don't say that lightly. Over the past eight weeks you have been asked to look honestly at yourselves — your strengths, your blind spots, the kind of leader you actually want to be, not just the kind of leader you think you're supposed to be. That is not comfortable work; building self-awareness rarely is. But it is exactly the work that turns competent managers into leaders people genuinely want to follow, and I hope you feel proud of having done it.

Leadership can manifest itself in many ways. In my experience, the leaders people remember most, the ones they would go anywhere for, are rarely the toughest or the most impressive.

They are the kind ones. Leadership without compassion might get results for a while, but it does not last, and it does not build anything worth having. Kindness is not the opposite of strong leadership — it is what strong leadership looks like when it is done well: noticing when someone is struggling, saying thank you and meaning it, giving people the benefit of the doubt before you give them your judgement.

None of that will show up on a performance review, but it is what your colleagues will remember about you in twenty years, long after they have forgotten what targets you hit.

I'd like to share a little of my own path. I've spent more than 35 years in senior leadership and executive roles, mostly in the health sector, where I began my career in 1986. I've led at CEO level, worked on national executive teams, and guided organisations through mergers, restructures and plenty of change.

Along the way, through board and advisory roles with organisations including the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Southern Cross Care and the Premier's Health and Wellbeing Advisory Council, I've gained a deep appreciation of good governance, sound strategy and the responsibility that comes with serving our communities.

Recently I ran my own coaching and organisational consulting practice, working with leaders and teams navigating change. I called it New Thinking, because that is really what coaching is about — creating the space for someone to think differently about a problem they have often been staring at for too long. What I found, again and again, sitting across from executives and emerging leaders alike, is that almost nobody arrives in a senior role feeling entirely ready for it. The confidence comes afterwards from doing the job, not before it.

So, if there is one thing I would want you to take from tonight, it is this. You do not need to have your career mapped out. I certainly never had mine mapped out — for those who think one applies for the role of Governor – wrong! You certainly don't!

I doubt anyone standing here tonight, including me, could have predicted quite where they would end up.

What matters far more is staying curious, being willing to keep learning long after you think you should already know the answers, and saying yes to opportunities even when, perhaps especially when, they make you a little nervous. Every role of greater responsibility I have taken on has asked something new of me. That is not a sign you are in the wrong place. It is usually a sign you are exactly in the right place and it's exciting and presents a challenge.

I would also encourage you not to let this be the end of anything. The relationships you have built with your fellow participants, with your mentors, with the wider Tasmanian Leaders network — these are worth holding onto and building on. I can tell you from decades of experience that no one leads well in isolation.

The best leaders I have known, and the leader I have tried to be, have leaned on mentors and trusted colleagues at every stage, not just at the beginning. They don't do it alone, they do it together. Leadership is not something you arrive at and then stop developing. It is a practice, built session by session, conversation by conversation, much like the one you have just completed.

Tasmania is a small state, and I mean that as a genuine strength. It means the leaders we grow here can know one another, support one another, and shape the direction of this place in ways that would be far harder in a larger jurisdiction. Every one of you, in your own workplace, your own community, your own corner of this island, now carries a little more capacity to do that well. That matters enormously for Tasmania's future — in our hospitals and schools, our businesses and community organisations, our public service and our regions.

To the graduates of 2024 and 2025 in the room tonight — thank you for coming back. Your presence here says something important — that this program, and this network, is not a single moment but an ongoing community, and I hope the 2026 cohort will do exactly the same in years to come.

So, to the Class of 2026, sincere congratulations. Enjoy this evening, be proud of what you have achieved, and go forward with confidence, curiosity, and the support of everyone in this room behind you.

To Tas Leaders, thank you for all you do.

Please enjoy the reception.