

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA AT A RECEPTION TO MARK THE  
RETIREMENT OF MR BILL BLEATHAM AS DIRECTOR OF TMAG,  
MONDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> MARCH 2014**

Thank you all for coming along this evening to celebrate Bill Bleatham's significant contribution to the arts and cultural life in Tasmania during his time as the Director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, an office from which he retired on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> December last year.

Actually Bill has served the public of Tasmania for a total of just over 36 years beginning back in 1977 when as a fresh, rosy-cheeked 18 year-old he fortuitously began work in the accounts section of the Police Department. I say fortuitously because a mere four months after Bill began work at the Police Department a charming young lady called Leanne began work in the typing pool at the Police Department and I understand that thereafter Bill spent more time in the typing pool than he did in the accounts section!

However, in a bid to get him out of the typing pool Bill was promoted to the Health Department Accounts Branch where I have to say he absolutely excelled, winning the Social Basketball Club best and fairest trophy and becoming the Social Club's Darts Champion. So good was his sporting prowess that he was again promoted, this time to the Education Department. In his new job Bill was a member of the budget team and lo and behold, Bill's team was the first in living history to balance the Education Department budget. Then Premier Michael Field was so amazed that he threw a party!

But all this was just a prelude to his career that saw him move at the age 34 to TMAG as the Public Programmes Manager. It was at this stage that Bill's real talents began to

emerge as he curated exhibitions and managed projects that engaged the public. Bill's capacity to engage the public with the Museum & Art Gallery is one of his greatest strengths and, I venture to suggest, an essential qualification for the office of director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, a position Bill took up in June 2002.

During Bill's 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> year stewardship TMAG has simply blossomed. There have been many successes. Bill refers to all of them as team successes which is a measure of his modesty and excellent management skills. They include:

- Securing the Commonwealth Archives Building to house over half a million objects in TMAG's collection
- Greater recognition of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, including the establishment of the Museum's Tasmanian Advisory Council and indigenous education programmes
- Some wonderful publications including that beautiful coffee table book of the Museum's collections that won the Tasmanian Book of the year award and of which I have a treasured copy.
- The development of supportive relationships with major donors.
- Two innovative and wonderful collaborations, one with the Queen Victoria Museum – it's just amazing that that collaboration had not previously been entered into – and one with MONA on Theatre of the World now showing in Paris.
- The recent totally life-changing, roof-lifting redevelopment of TMAG, Stage 1 including the Bond Store.
- The unprecedented growth in the number of visitors to TMAG

Mind you, there were also the odd moments that were not entirely triumphant like the occasion when TMAG made a big fuss about putting a giant squid on public display. Specialists packed carefully it with ice and VIP's were invited to a special preview. Unfortunately, the unknown factor was that the giant squid exudes a secretion akin to anti-freeze which left the giant fish looking more like a huge collapsed blancmange than a fearsome creature from the depths the ocean and it was quickly hurried away from public view.

But I know that Bill considers his biggest achievement during his time as Director of TMAG has been his staff of which I understand that 75 % have moved to second and third positions within the museum. I do know that every time that Frances and I have been to see something at TMAG it has been patently obvious to us that the relationship between Bill and every member of his staff is one of warm friendship and complete mutual respect and trust.

I enquired of some of your staff Bill how they thought you would remember your stewardship of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and was told you would most certainly like to be remembered as the Director of, "the most significant and diverse collection of heritage buildings on the one site in the nation."

Bill, all Tasmanians are indebted to you for making such a tremendous contribution to the culture of the State through your work at TMAG. We are very sorry that you have decided to – as the Quakers would say – put down your concern - but you go with our since thanks and warmest good wishes to you and Leanne for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen: a toast to Bill Bleatham.