

**POLAND-AUSTRALIA 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, FRIDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2022**

Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the significant 50th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and Poland.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

May I acknowledge among us:

- the Honourable Elise Archer MP, Attorney-General, representing the Premier, the Honourable Peter Gutwein MP;
- Councillor Helen Burnett, Deputy Lord Mayor of Hobart representing the Lord Mayor;
- Ed Kremzer, Polish Consul in Tasmania;
- Dr Elizabeth Chelkowska, Vice-President, Polish Association in Hobart;
- Dr Tim Ault, Director, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Tasmania State Office;
- and leaders of the Polish Community in Hobart and Launceston.

The Polish-Australian social and cultural connection is an enduring and affectionate one. There is good reason, given that much of our relationship was forged during and immediately after World War Two.

It is perhaps not so well known that during World War Two the breach of diplomatic relations between the Soviet and Polish Governments in 1943 saw

Polish interests assumed by the Australian Legation deep in Russia at [the Russian city of] Kuyibyshev.

On 20 February 1972, it was announced in Canberra by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Bowen, that Australia and Poland had decided to enter into full diplomatic relations at Ambassadorial level. Until then, Poland's interests in Australia had been represented from 1956 by a Consul-General based in Sydney.¹

Our first Polish Ambassador to Australia, Mr Eugeniusz Wisniewski, arrived in Canberra in November 1973.²

The first Australian Ambassador to Poland, Mr Francis Stuart, had presented his credentials a little earlier, in September 1973.

Our enduring and affectionate ties emerged from post-World War Two migration of Poles, and other displaced Europeans, to Tasmania.

Polish soldiers of the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division fought alongside Australian diggers at Tobruk. They forged friendships and camaraderie leading directly to the resettlement of Polish soldiers to Tasmania in 1947 and 1948.

Many took up work with the Hydro Electric Commission, building Tasmania's electricity infrastructure in some of the toughest conditions in our central highlands. These soldiers were the first organised group of non-British migrants to be contracted and sponsored by the Australian Government.³

The first intake of Polish soldiers was a significant trial to assess immigration and assimilation into the Australian way of life of people from war-torn Europe. The trial was a success. It opened the way for nearly five hundred thousand immigrants from Europe.⁴ Australia was transformed.

There had been some Polish settlement in Tasmania well before the end of WWII. The first known Pole to settle in Australia was the convict Jozsev Potowski. He came with his wife and son to Hobart in 1803. He died in 1824 and is buried in St David's Park.⁵

The Polish explorer, Sir Pawel Strzelecki, explored and mapped most of Tasmania in 1840-42. He is remembered through the mountain named after him on Flinders Island, a mountain which Don and I have attempted to climb, unsuccessfully I must confess.

There are many links between Australia and Poland at personal and diplomatic levels that go back many years and continue today. In New Town there is a monument to Tobruk as well as the Polish Club and Dom Polski (Polish House). One of the lanes at the Glenorchy War Memorial Swimming Pool is the Polish Lane. A monument to Polish settlers is in King's Park Launceston. There are other monuments around Tasmania.⁶

In the fields of science, culture and sport, people with Polish heritage have made significant contributions to our society. They include science communicator Dr Karl Kruszelnicki, better known as Dr Karl, pianist David Helfgott, actress Magda Szubanski, world class swimmers Michael Klim and Daniel Kowalski, and tennis player and coach, Alicia Molik.⁷

We also know Polish professors at the University of Tasmania who have made significant contributions to sociology and history, one of whom is with us tonight.

We have been enriched by Polish literature. Famous authors include Joseph Conrad, and I am sure many of us have read "Heart of Darkness." Surprisingly, Joseph Conrad has a link with Hobart. The remains of an old sailing ship launched in Scotland in 1869, *Otago*, is lying in the Derwent River at the inlet named Otago Bay in her honour. The *Otago* was the first and only sea command of the famous Polish mariner and novelist. There is a small plaque to identify the iron ribs and part of the keel, opposite a small lane called Conrad Drive.⁸

I have read a contemporary novel, "Drive your Plow over the Bones of the Dead" written by Olga Tokarczuk, the winner of the International Man Booker in 2018. It is a fascinating and rather unusual read. One description of it by a Goodreads reviewer as "literary, quirky, snarky, noir" is apt. I recommend it.

May I acknowledge Poland raising \$150,000 during the 2019-20 bushfire season and in 2021 the Polish government provided Australia with one million doses of the Pfizer vaccine.⁹

In conclusion, may I make three brief observations in respect of Government House links with Poland. First, my predecessor, then-Governor Kate Warner, hosted a reception in 2018 to mark the 100th anniversary of the Independence of Poland.

Secondly, the last Polish official diplomatic visit to Tasmania was in February 2015 by His Excellency Ambassador Mr Pawel and Mrs Elzbieta Milewski. We

look forward to an official visit at some stage by current Ambassador Michał Kołodziejcki to stay at Government House.

Thirdly, one of our Security Guard team migrated to Australia from Poland in the early 1990s. I believe that last week he and Ed Kremzer had a good chat in Polish over the phone!

Thank you and I apologise for my less than perfect Polish pronunciations!

[David introduces musicians]

Thank you

¹ The Canberra Times, Saturday 27 October 1973 page 9.

² The Canberra Times, Saturday 27 October 1973 page 9.

³ <https://polishassociationhobart.org.au/home-2/the-polish-community> accessed 17/02/22.

⁴ "50 speech" - notes written by Ed Kremzer for the Parliament of Tasmania and attached to 11 February email to David Owen.

⁵ Email from Ed Kremzer to David Owen 11/02/22.

⁶ Email from Ed Kremzer to David Owen 11/02/22.

⁷ Email from Ed Kremzer to David Owen 11/02/22.

⁸ <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/3171271/joseph-conrad>.

⁹ Email from Ed Kremzer to David Owen 11/02/22.