

**28th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
AUSTRALASIAN HUMOUR STUDIES NETWORK (AHSN)
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
DRAWING ROOM, WEDNESDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

Good evening. I welcome you all to Government House to mark the 28th annual Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) conference. I warmly welcome all delegates, in particular those who have joined us from other parts of Australia.

I begin by paying 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.

Don and I are very happy to be able to host you as part of your conference program. I am told that this is the second time Hobart has hosted the conference. AHSN was established in 1997, after your AHSN Convenor and then president of the International Society for Humour Studies (ISHS), Jessica Milner Davis, proposed its establishment. You have grown from 40 members and 10 discipline areas to over 350 scholars and practitioners.¹

I confess that I was not aware that humour formed the specific basis of an academic discipline. I was therefore somewhat relieved when told that your field and especially the associated body of research literature has a relatively short history. That is interesting in itself, given that humour, its use and our responses to it, and the formulation of humorous content are all things that we feel are an implicit part of our lives. I was also very relieved that I was not expected to make any humorous remarks.

With all the negative things happening in the world, from the pandemic to increased military tensions in our own region and further abroad, as well as natural disasters such as has just devastated Tonga, it is important for us to find some balance.

That balance may be supported by humour. In suggesting that humour be added to the concept of psychological capital, Professor Fred Luthans noted that humour generally has a positive social impact, both on the deliverer and the recipient. He notes that a person with a good sense of humour has been shown to attract more social support.²

¹ <https://ahsnhumourstudies.org>

² Luthans et al, 2007. Psychological Capital – Developing the Human Competitive Edge, Oxford University Press p165

Humour is a universal language. All cultures acknowledge humour by spontaneous laughter, although the content and construction of humour is not necessarily shared.

A well-known example of the use of humour in clinical settings is the work of the Humour Foundation in hospitals with their 'Clown Doctors'.³ The Foundation indicates that

“studies have shown that laughter can combat many common ills. For instance, research suggests that humour may lower blood pressure and release endorphins. Laughter is also proven to improve circulation, stimulate the nervous system, heighten the immune system and make the heart stronger”⁴.

Your conference has the theme: The politics of humour and the humour of politics⁵. Sessions are an opportunity to discuss humour in politics, at work, and in education. Humour in and of politics will be explored by your keynote speakers including the use of political satire and cartooning.⁶ The papers sound fascinating to me, in particular, “The disclosure of Kremlin agents: Humorous Uptakes of the Topic in Ukrainian Public Discourse”, and “The Anatomy of the Gag: Havel, Stoppard and Comedies of Political Censorship.” Your conference sounds much more interesting than most law conferences I have attended!

In closing, I thank all of the organisers of the conference for choosing Hobart as your venue.

That said, if anyone can maintain good humour in organising a conference, it is you. You not only share an academic interest in humour, but also apply your knowledge for the benefit of others. I hope that as well as your conference work, you are able to enjoy our beautiful island State.

Thank you for your attendance this evening. I look forward to discussing humour with you as we share in some refreshments.

³ <https://www.humourfoundation.org.au/> accessed 21 Jan 22

⁴ <https://www.humourfoundation.org.au/about-us/> accessed 21 Jan 22

⁵ <https://ahsnhumourstudies.org/annual-conference/> accessed 21 Jan 22

⁶ <https://ahsnhumourstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Conference-Program.pdf> accessed 21 Jan 22