

ROYAL HOBART REGATTA 2022
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, THURSDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2022

[Vice-Regal Salute]

Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the 2022 Royal Hobart Regatta.

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 you:

- David Skegg, President, Royal Hobart Regatta Association;
- Commander Andrew Pepper, Commanding Officer HMAS *Hobart*;
- Commander Mark Tandy, Commanding Officer Naval Headquarters Tasmania;
- Rear Admiral Stephen Gilmore, Defence Advocate, Department of State Growth.

Your website states that the Royal Hobart Regatta is one of Australia's longest running aquatic events. We can also comfortably say, I'm sure, that it is also one of Australia's longest running and much-loved community events.

It is worth recollecting briefly the circumstances leading to what became our first Regatta. *The Hobart Town Courier* newspaper of Friday the 16th of November 1838 had this to say, and I quote:

“That the object is to establish an annual fête for the double purpose of the encouragement of our sea-men, and to commemorate the Anniversary of Tasman's Discovery of this Island, on the first of December, 1642.

“We hear that it is Sir John Franklin's intention next year very considerably to increase the scale of attractions of the annual Regatta...”

“No effort will be spared on the part of His Excellency to render the commencement of the celebration of this Anniversary agreeable and attractive to the public. In order to effect this object, Sir John Franklin has kindly given up that portion of the

Government Domain which juts out into the Derwent, near the garden, and where the pavilion stands.”¹

End of quote.

I understand also that the Abel Tasman anniversary was deliberately chosen by Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin as a way of ushering in greater use of the word “Tasmania.” They wanted to get away from the negative convict connotations still strongly associated with the name “Van Diemen’s Land.”

Indeed, historian John West in his two-volume *The History of Tasmania* published later in 1852, wrote:

“In our native land [England] we are looked upon with feelings of horror. An old and respected colonist ... took his family to an hotel. He had not been there long before the landlord learnt that he had come from this place: he came to him with a face full of concern, and said, ‘You did not tell me, sir, that you came from Van Diemen’s Land; do not let it be known, or I shall be ruined.’”² End of quote.

So, the fact that the Regatta actively promoted the use of the name “Tasmania” is of some historical significance.

There were a few hiccups with the early patronage of the Regatta.

Firstly, in 1838, Lieutenant Sir John Franklin introduced alcohol to the Regatta by turning on free beer and cheese to all settlers attending this first Regatta. By 1842, Lady Jane Franklin was describing the Regatta as having become “a festivity of licentiousness and immense disorder”. Sir John told the committee that he would no longer continue his patronage if it did not accept stringent terms to preserve decency and propriety. It did not. The regatta was without patronage that year. Coincidentally, Sir John’s commission was withdrawn and he returned to England in 1843.

Secondly, in 1855, Sir Henry Fox Young made it known that in future he would prefer the people’s beloved annual regatta to be held elsewhere than at Pavilion Point near Government House. His reason was that spectators were leaving broken bottles lying around.

Public reaction was inevitable and merciless. According to one newspaper, and I quote:

“Sir Henry Young, careful of the morals of the people committed to his governance, is anxious to guard the sacred precincts of the Government Domain ... Imagine for an

instant that persons should presume to form merry picnics within the very shadow of New Government House, that hungry and thirsty groups should scatter themselves over vice-regal grass, for the purpose of regaling themselves ... loud merriment and hearty laughter must of course grate harshly upon the delicate ears of so fashionable a Governor ... The picnickers ought to have supplied themselves with superbly cut decanters. Their elegant fragments might not have shocked His Excellency.”³ End of quote.

The committee was upset by this and the Governor was not invited to be patron.

The new venue for the Regatta was Macquarie Point and after that things settled down and Vice-Regal patronage continued.

The Regatta became an annual favourite, combining, as it did, athleticism, healthy competition and great social cohesion.

Fast forward 167 years and, as your Governor, I am delighted to support our fabulous three-day program, though do use the bins. Thanks to the Regatta Association and for the support of many generous and willing sponsors for the program.

I love sport but I assure you I shall not be competing in the Double Derwent Trans Derwent swim on Sunday morning!

Nor shall I be in the McDonald’s North Hobart Two Bridges Kayak Race on Saturday, which is described as being for “experienced” paddlers. I discovered they paddle flat out under the Tasman Bridge to the Bowen Bridge and back again to the finish line off the Regatta Grounds.

Congratulations to the organisers of all the variety of events for younger people. I am sure they will enjoy them after a few days back at school and with a long weekend to enjoy. I have fond memories of attending the Regatta as a child and later with my own children. We hope to bring our grandsons this weekend.

It is also great to have an inaugural Riverside Music Concert on Saturday evening. I am sure this will be welcomed by our local performers who have felt the impact of Covid on their live performances.

I wish us the very best for our Regatta long weekend and please enjoy the reception.

Thank you.

¹ *The Hobart Town Courier*, Friday 16 November 1838.

² West, John, *History of Tasmania, Volume 1*, Launceston, Henry Dowling, 1852.

³ *Tasmanian Daily News* (Hobart), Wednesday 7 November 1855 page 3.