

**AUSTRALASIAN COUNCIL OF JUSTICES' ASSOCIATIONS  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA,  
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, FRIDAY 7 OCTOBER 2022**

**[Vice-regal salute is played]**

Good evening and welcome to this Government House reception for delegates attending the Australasian Council of Justices' Associations Meeting.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea, and culture. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

May I acknowledge among us:

- The Honourable Elise Archer MP, Attorney-General
- David Hudson, President, Tasmanian Society of Justices of the Peace
- Rachael O'Grady, President, Australasian Council of Justices' Associations
- Peter Osborne, President, Royal Federation of New Zealand Justices' Associations
- Jonathan Higgins, Tasmania Police Assistant Commissioner representing Commissioner Darren Hine
- Michael Hill, former Chief Magistrate.

As Patron of the Tasmanian Society of Justices of the Peace, I warmly welcome all delegates from interstate and New Zealand – or I could I rephrase that island-fashion and simply say “all overseas delegates”.

I also congratulate our Tasmanian Society on your centenary this year, and what better way to do so than by hosting this meeting in Hobart.

I shall mention the centenary year of 1922 in a moment. First, I note that this afternoon you visited the historic Mount Nelson Signal Station. Semaphore signalling began well before this Government House building was completed, in 1858. But there is one feature of this building, which may have something to do with visual communication. That is the mysterious South Tower, which directly faces the river and estuary.

The Main Tower and the west-facing Police Tower – both of which you may have seen from the main driveway, with their prominent flagpoles – are accessed by either a series of steps, or a series of ladders.

The South Tower, however, can only be accessed by a ceiling trapdoor. Not only that, it has no floor! This may well have been some sort of cost-cutting measure, because of the huge expense of completing the building. However, the fact is that when you do get up into the South Tower and stand on its narrow ledges, the slit-like windows provide an almost military view of the river. Perhaps it was designed as a lookout for potential enemy vessels approaching Hobart.

Government House also has a large, deep dry moat running around most of its circumference. Another mystery, as there is no written explanation for it that we can find. The moat certainly lets good light into the basement. However, was such extensive excavation to make a sub-ground level necessary up here on this prominent hill? Again, perhaps it was done with defence in mind.

That might have been the case, in what was then a remote and vulnerable part of the British Empire, long before the establishment of the Commonwealth and sought-after federal defence force.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in the 1898 and 1899 referenda on Federation, our Tasmanian “yes” vote was proportionately the highest, along with Victoria.<sup>2</sup>

Tasmanians were intensely loyal to the Crown and to Britain as “home”. But that did not last. I now refer again to the year 1922 – the year in which our Tasmanian Society of Justices of the Peace was founded.

In the two decades after Federation, although the British Governors in Tasmania were respected as individuals, agitation grew that something was not right about the Vice-Regal set-up here. For their part, the British Governors

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<sup>1</sup> “The idea behind Federation was that it would benefit all six colonies, and that there would be a federal defence force able to protect every part of the nation” –

[Getting it Together | Tasmania | Road to Federation | Overview \(moadoph.gov.au\)](#), accessed 5 October 2022.

<sup>2</sup> [The Referendums 1898-1900 - Federation Factsheets \(aec.gov.au\)](#), accessed 5 October 2022.

complained that their lump sum salary was insufficient. They had to cover their own working costs and were frequently out of pocket. They had to resort to using their private wealth to pay for, say, official travel expenses or hosting a Ball.

Increasingly, Tasmanians began to complain of having yet another expensive, quote, “imported Governor”. Surely a local could do the job just as well.

Matters came to a head, when in January 1922 Governor Sir William Allardyce cut short his term and returned with his family to England. This building then remained empty for three years – while Tasmanian Chief Justices administered the State. The same happened again from 1930 to 1933.

During those six empty years, many suggestions were made as to what to do with these 71 rooms and the outbuildings. Suggestions included a maternity hospital; a gift to the University; a war memorial museum; a jazz palais amongst others– the latter somewhat tongue in cheek.

But there was one other notable and very serious suggestion. Given that we have among us our Attorney- General, the Honourable Elise Archer, I feel that this quote is in order, from *The Mercury* in September 1924:

“... At the invitation of the Government about 25 members of both Houses of Parliament yesterday morning paid a visit of inspection to Government House ... The Attorney-General showed members plans of the structural alterations proposed ... It is intended that the large Ball Room should be utilised as the House of Assembly, and the largest of the upstairs rooms as the Legislative Council ... The building, practically as it stands, will permit of all the necessary smaller rooms being made available. In addition, it is proposed to arrange for accommodation for northern members ... The visitors were greatly impressed with the capacity and general suitability of the building, and interest was shown in the quality of the furnishings.”<sup>3</sup>

End quote! I am unsure whether our Attorney-General is not making new plans!

Eventually, our first Australian-born Governor of Tasmania was Sir Stanley Burbury, 1973 to 1982. Amongst his accomplishments was the passing of the *Governor of Tasmania Act 1982*, which separates the Office of Governor from the State Service Act.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Mercury*, Thursday 25 September 1924, page 7.

Earlier, the *Government House Land Act 1964* “reserved for all time” this Estate for the Vice-Regal office. That Act was accompanied by a large chunk of the estate being gifted to the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, much to the displeasure of the then Official Secretary.

That 1964 Act was amended a few years ago to enable Government House to raise private revenue, which we do through tours, sports facilities hire, sales of kitchen produce, wines, gin, books and rental income. So, money is once again a talking point here – but for good purposes. We use all of that income to assist in ongoing and valuable, expensive heritage maintenance.

On that note, thank you and do enjoy your meeting tomorrow.