

INTERNATIONAL TEMPERATE REEFS SYMPOSIUM 2023
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
STANLEY BURBURY THEATRE, UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA,
SANDY BAY, MONDAY 9 JANUARY 2023

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to address you by officially welcoming all delegates to this 2023 International Temperate Reefs Symposium.

We are always delighted to host national and international events of this nature in Tasmania. Your conference is only the third major in-person conference I have had the privilege of opening, because of the severe disruptions caused by Covid. Therefore, I am especially delighted to welcome you all.

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 continued connection to land, sea, and waters. I acknowledge the impacts of colonisation upon our First People and commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

I have perused your impressive and ambitious symposium program. It is a great credit to everyone involved that you will consider diverse and important marine ecosystems, many of which are affected by climate change and will receive your close attention and expertise over the next four days.

You will not be surprised that I would like to talk a little bit about Tasmania as an island. Our identity is all about the sea that surrounds us.

Aborigines have inhabited this part of our continent for at least 40,000 years. This was well before our island developed, coming about through non-anthropogenic climate change. Gradual deglaciation and ice melt, following the Last Glacial Maximum, resulted in the formation of Bass Strait, creating our island about 12,000 years ago. Today, we sit about 250 kilometres from the mainland.

We may have been geographically and historically remote as Tasmanians, but we have the distinction of being associated with one of the great novels of all time, Jonathan Swift's 1726 satire, *Gulliver's Travels*. That classic is about shipwrecked Lemuel Gulliver's travel adventures in lands of miniature peoples and giants. Early in the novel we learn how it all began; I quote

"We set sail from Bristol, on May 4, 1699; and our voyage at first was very prosperous. It would not be proper, for some reasons, to trouble the reader with the particulars of our adventures in those [northern] seas. Let it suffice to inform the reader that, in our passage from thence to the East Indies, we were driven by a violent storm, to the northwest of Van Diemen's Land."

End of quote.

Gulliver and a few surviving companions made it ashore, so beginning his great adventures here in our State.

In historical reality, Dutch sailor Abel Tasman had landed here in 1642 and named the newly discovered geographical landmass Van Diemen's Land after his boss, Anthony Van Diemen, of the Dutch East India Company.

Some one hundred and fifty years later, British Royal Navy mariners Matthew Flinders and George Bass, with a crew of eight, proved, by circumnavigation, that this land was not contiguous with the mainland, but an island – and a large one at that. Today we are the world's 26th largest inhabited island, around the size of Sri Lanka with a population of 22 million, whereas Tasmania has about 550,000.

Maritime business possibly prevented this island being abandoned soon after Europeans arrived here from Sydney in 1803. Near-starvation led to unanticipated early wealth through massive whaling and sealing industries. Both industries grew to international significance.

This resulted in a predictable downside; whales were rapidly exterminated from the Derwent River and Estuary. They have not returned, although their migrating numbers are once again healthy along our east coast.

Many of you will already know that our Tasmanian marine waterways have been and continue to be subject to human influence. May I give a few examples:

- Between 1973 and 1997, jarosite, a waste product of zinc refining, containing trace quantities of heavy metals, was dumped off the edge of our continental shelf. Some 170,000 tonnes per annum were dumped, in what was described as “an oceanographically, and biologically, dynamic area.”¹
- From our Zinc Works, situated on the Derwent River, heavy metal by-products in the past went directly into the river, in such great concentrations it was considered dangerous to consume fish caught near the works.
- From the early 1980s, Northern Pacific seastars arrived in Tasmanian waters as stowaways on ships from Japan. They thrived in our cool waters and bred furiously. By the turn of this century there were an estimated 30 million of them in the Derwent Estuary alone. They have a particular liking for shellfish and so could devastate local waters. The battle to eradicate them continues.
- Ocean warming has decimated our beautiful and ecologically important giant kelp forests. Our Professor Craig Johnson will address you shortly. I know he is a lead investigator in efforts to restore our kelp forests.²
- Finally, in respect of salmon farming: whether you view the controversies around this farming as political or not, it is a maritime temperate reef issue that can be legitimately included here.

May I conclude more positively.

Firstly, I believe that Tasmanian fishers are thrilled that warmer seas have brought lots of snapper down here!

¹ [Has jarosite dumping at a deepwater site off eastern Tasmania, Australia, had a measurable effect on the midwater zooplankton and micronekton communities? | SpringerLink](#), accessed 5 January 2022.

² <https://www.imas.utas.edu.au/news/news-items/restoring-tasmanias-giant-kelp-forests-the-focus-of-new-research-project>, accessed 5 January 2023.

Secondly, no matter the state of our Derwent River, our local Tasmanian tiger shark thrives. That name is in less usage now, for obvious reasons of mistaken identity. The formal name is much preferred, that is, the “broad-nosed seven-gill shark”. According to our Tasmanian shark expert, Chris Black, this unusual species, quote: “performs a vital function in the Derwent estuary, that is the removal of carrion and other rubbish from the waterway, and they should be left alone to do what they do.” End quote.

I am informed that they annoy our fishermen because they like to chase their catches and snaffle them up just before they get them to the surface.

In conclusion, on behalf of all Tasmanians, I again warmly welcome you all, and wish you all a most stimulating, rewarding, and enjoyable symposium.

Thank you.