

**AUSTRALIAN LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS
ASSOCIATION (ALERA) CONFERENCE 2023
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOTEL GRAND CHANCELLOR, HOBART, FRIDAY 27 OCTOBER 2023**

I warmly welcome you all to this Australian Labour and Employment Relations Association Annual Conference. It is a pleasure for me to welcome delegates from all across Australia to Hobart.

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 and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea and waters.

I am impressed with the breadth of stakeholders that make up ALERA, as “the voice of the industrial relations profession.”¹ Your annual conference gives you all the opportunity to come together to update, exchange ideas and develop policies about significant issues in workplace employment and industrial relations.

I wish you all well in your discussions.

In welcoming you to Tasmania, may I say a little bit about our island home. As the world’s 26th largest island, we have about 550,000 people. By comparison, Sri Lanka is about the same size, but has a population of around 22 million. We are renowned for our clean air, high quality produce, and accessibility to walks to large areas of listed wilderness. Our Wilderness World Heritage Areas cover almost 20 percent of our island and include over 1,000 known Aboriginal sites.² These include rock shelters, rock markings and shell middens. Around half of our State is set aside for national parks and reserves.³

¹ [Australian Labour and Employment Relations Association - About ALERA](#), accessed 23 October 2023.

² [The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Areas | Discover Tasmania](#), accessed 19 May 2022.

³ <https://parks.tas.gov.au/about-us/managing-our-parks-and-reserves/reserve-listing> accessed 22 Mar 23

Our island story is ancient and complex with some 40,000 years of continuous Aboriginal heritage and culture.

Our Aboriginal population diminished over a 30-year period of conflicts, especially during the Black War in the 1820s and early 1830s. The spread of infectious diseases also had fatal consequences. Currently, we have some 30,000 Tasmanians who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.⁴

In respect of our European cultural heritage, we claim Australia's first novel written by a Van Diemen's Land convict, Henry Savery, in 1830, titled *Quintus Servinton*, and partly written in his prison cell in Hobart, while serving time for forgery of banknotes.

We claim that the movement for our Australian Federation was started in Tasmania in the 1850s. Former High Court Justice, Sir William Deane, fairly dubbed Tasmanian lawyer and politician, Andrew Inglis Clark, as 'the primary architect of our constitution'.⁵ Significantly, Clark modified Hare's electoral system to achieve our Hare-Clark system of voting, still used today. Clark's contributions to Tasmania have been recognised by a Hobart electorate having been renamed 'Clark' in 2019.

Although Tasmania was behind other States, we had our first Labor Government under John Earle in 1909, after our Hare-Clark electoral system was introduced, though the Earle government was short-lived, only 7 days!

Tasmanians have a record of inventions, including such things as the portable sheep handler, which fits a sheep snugly into a kind of wheelbarrow; a forestry logging grab vehicle; the portable fibreglass cabin Igloo Satellite for Antarctic Living; the world's first laminated tennis racket; the wave-piercing catamaran and the Dynasphere Lightning Protection System.⁶

In the Arts, we have fine galleries throughout our State, including our Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Maritime Museum, our famous MONA,

⁴ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/census-population-and-housing-counts-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>
accessed 19 February 2023.

⁵ <https://www.utas.edu.au/library/exhibitions/clark/work.html>

⁶ *Tasmanian Inventions & Innovations*, Launceston, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 1987, various pagings.

The Museum of Old and New Art, all in Hobart, and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, in Launceston.

Hobart is, of course, a major centre of Antarctic science, education, research, and logistics.⁷ Our University of Tasmania Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) and our Australian Antarctic Division are at the centre of this Antarctic activity. And we are proud that Hobart is the home of the Secretariat for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic and Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).⁸

And I note that we claim more heritage-listed stone buildings than the rest of Australia, together.

I fully appreciate that your conference is “Australian Labour and Employment Relations, so it is time to stop my Tasmanian flag waving, and I shall conclude by sharing with you a Government House-related employment anecdote to do with our convict past.

In 1840, Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin and Lady Franklin selected James Blackburn as the architect to design a new Government House building on its current site on the Domain.

In 1833, Blackburn had worked as a sewerage inspector in London. Significant personal financial hardship led to him forging a £600 cheque. He was sentenced to transportation for life. After arrival in Hobart, he secured employment with the Department of Roads and Bridges. The Franklins subsequently chose him because no one else could do the job of a competent architect.

Blackburn made numerous new design concepts. But then the Franklins invited a young architect, William Porden Kay from England to Hobart. Kay was Sir John’s nephew, and the Franklins effectively dismissed Blackburn – now because of his “tainted” convict past. Blackburn objected bitterly but there was little he could do.

⁷ [Hobart: a gateway city | Antarctic Tasmania](#), accessed 17 October 2023.

⁸ David Agnew 17 October 2023 email to David Owen.

I am sure there are many delegates here thinking about an unfair dismissal claim!

Issues also arose about the use of convict labour for the house's construction. The Legislative Council in Hobart was clear about the matter and granted £5000, quote, "towards defraying the expenses of erecting a new Government House in the domain ... with the condition attached that no part of the money should be expended in the employment of convicts."⁹ End quote.

On the one hand it was felt that convicts should not be associated with this building. But there was also a strong anti-transportation movement which felt that no monies should be paid to support, quote, "the criminals of the mother country."¹⁰

The reality was otherwise. Many convicts were skilled stonemasons, plumbers, carpenters and the like, and much of Government House is a result of convict labour. And, in fact, some of the beautiful interior ceilings were painted by a 22-year-old ticket-of-leave convict, John Wiltson.

Well, that is enough from me, so may I wish you all a most enjoyable and rewarding Conference here in Hobart, a very wise choice of venue.

Thank you.

⁹ *Launceston Examiner*, Saturday 8 January 1853, page 5.

¹⁰ *The Courier (Hobart)*, Tuesday 11 January 1853, page 2.