

**THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
SOUTHERN TASMANIAN BRANCH – COMMONWEALTH DAY 2024
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WEDNESDAY 13 MARCH 2024**

VICE-REGAL SALUTE IS PLAYED

Good evening and a very warm welcome to this reception to mark Commonwealth Day 2024, the 75th anniversary of the formation of the Commonwealth.

I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose Country we gather. We honour them, and today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community, as ongoing custodians of Country.

I am very pleased to acknowledge the wide range of Royal and Loyal organisations represented this evening, including the The Royal Commonwealth Society Southern Tasmania Branch, Honorary Consuls of the United Kingdom and of the Republic of India, the Royal Society of Tasmania, the Royal Over- Seas League Tasmania, and the Welsh Society of Southern Tasmania.

May I extend a special thank you to Mr Joel Solak, Pipe Major and the Derwent Scottish Pipe Band, for their performance at the entrance to the House as you arrived.

The annual celebration of Commonwealth Day began on Monday, marking the beginning of a week-long series of events. These include faith based and civic gatherings, debates, flag raising ceremonies and cultural events. All these events link to the theme of Commonwealth Day 2024 and to the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in Samoa beginning on 21 October with the theme: "One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Common Wealth".

There have been numerous news reports indicating that His Majesty plans to visit Australia around his attendance at CHOGM. We are, of course, all hoping that he may find time to visit us in Tasmania at some time in the future.

I shall read the Sovereign's Commonwealth Day message shortly. We have received a transcript of it only, so we cannot display the Message tonight, as we usually do.

His Majesty takes as his theme an issue of importance to the Commonwealth, which he thinks can have an impact on people.

Over the years, the Message has dealt with the sense of the Commonwealth as a family, human rights, the position of young people and of women, diversity, and working together for the eradication of poverty. Last year, His Majesty acknowledged the enormous potential represented by some one and a half billion young people around the globe.

For this 2024 Commonwealth Day Message, His Majesty writes¹:

“The seventy-fifth anniversary of The Commonwealth is a moment to reflect on the remarkable journey that our unique family of free and independent nations has made since 1949.

Last year, The Bahamas celebrated its fiftieth anniversary of Independence, as Grenada has this year, and Papua New Guinea will next year. Each of these milestones – and many others like them – represent the fulfilment of countless aspirations and the achievement of such remarkable potential. And the Commonwealth's growth, with new members continuing to join our family of nations, demonstrates clearly that whilst we may not all have a shared history, we have common ambitions for a better future – working together to build resilience and respond to global challenges.

The Commonwealth family is strongest when we are connected, through friendship.

¹ Email Paul Singer / David Owen 10 March 2024

As I have said before, the Commonwealth is like the wiring of a house, and its people, our energy and our ideas are the current that runs through those wires. Together and individually, we are strengthened by sharing perspectives and experiences, and by offering and borrowing the myriad ways we have each tackled the challenges of our time. This is true both at the level of nations and, indeed, at the local level.

We recognize today that our diversity is our greatest strength. The Commonwealth represents a third of humanity, from all regions of the world, with all the different experiences, knowledge, and aspirations that this brings.

Wherever we live, we are united by the many challenges we face – whether it be climate change, the loss of Nature, or the social and economic changes that new technologies are bringing. Our diversity means that these challenges affect us all differently and that we experience their impacts in different ways. Their seriousness, however, is common to each one of us.

All of this means that we must work together to understand each other's perspectives, including the inequalities and injustices which still resonate to this day. We must find ways of healing, and to support each other to pursue solutions. I cannot say often enough that it is by coming together that we create the best chances to improve our world and the lives of people everywhere. Indeed, over the years countless people across the Commonwealth have been inspired to form their own Commonwealth Associations, from lawyers and accountants, to business and trade networks, and many more besides. The work they do is absolutely vital, sharing professional knowledge, experience, and expertise across the Continents for the betterment of each one of us.

The Commonwealth, above all, retains a particular focus on our young people, who make up two-thirds of the entire Commonwealth population. Whether in Kenya or Malaysia, Vanuatu or Dominica, Malta, or Canada, I never cease to be impressed by their creativity,

innovative skills, and hard work, often in the most challenging circumstances. Their energy is transforming approaches to development, technology and preserving and restoring Nature and will, I hope, help to shape, and safeguard our common future.

Having recently celebrated my own seventy-fifth birthday, it warms my heart to reflect on the way the Commonwealth has been a constant throughout my own life – a precious source of strength, inspiration, and pride.

In recent weeks, I have been most deeply touched by your wonderfully kind and thoughtful good wishes for my health and, in return, can only continue to serve you, to the best of my ability, throughout the Commonwealth. My belief in our shared endeavours and in the potential of our people remains as sure and strong as it has ever been. I have no doubt that we will continue to support one another across the Commonwealth as, together, we continue this vital journey.”

End of His Majesty’s quote.

It is worthwhile to reflect on the history of the Commonwealth and on the strength that the association has had as an agent for change in the world. The membership of the Commonwealth has grown to now 56 countries. The last two countries to join – Rwanda and Mozambique – did not, interestingly, have any prior ties to the British Empire. Both joined voluntarily, based on free and equal voluntary cooperation.

May I conclude by saying that it is a great pleasure to host this reception to mark Commonwealth Day 2024. May we recognise the contribution of our Commonwealth to the rules-based order of the world. May I also recognise and acknowledge the work of the Royal Commonwealth Society to raise awareness of not only the Commonwealth, but also the many benefits that membership brings.

Please now enjoy this reception.

Thank you.