

**SCHOOL FOOD MATTERS INC
AND FEDERATION OF CANTEENS IN SCHOOLS
NATIONAL SCHOOL FOOD SUMMIT
OPENING ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
C3 CONVENTION CENTRE, SOUTH HOBART, MONDAY 4 MAY 2026**

Good morning.

Thank you, Uncle Dougie, for your Welcome to Country. May I welcome you all, and a special welcome to those who have travelled from around Australia to be here in Tasmania for this year's National School Food Summit.

This Summit is both timely and essential: a shared commitment to ensure that every child in Australia has access to nutritious food at school, food that supports their health, their capacity to learn, and to participate fully in their education.

In Tasmania, we are pleased to contribute to this national conversation in a practical and meaningful way.

Tasmania is regarded by many as a “foodie” state, described by journalist Matthew Denholm as “Treasure Island and leading a Tasmanian culinary revolution,” a description with which I could not disagree. A 2021 survey by the sector group, Sprout, of Tasmania's small-scale producers found that 70% had relocated from the mainland. Chefs are also moving here, and there is a demand for breweries, distillers, slow food and quality produce.¹ Farmers' markets can now be found across our State. Hobart's Farmers Gate Market started around 15 years ago with 12 stallholders and only one selling fresh produce. Today it has more than 170 small-scale local producers.²

So, Tasmania is a fitting place to talk about nutritious food and as the first State in Australia to establish a comprehensive, Government-supported school lunch program, we are pleased to bring together leaders, organisations, practitioners,

¹ 'Treasure Island' Matthew Denholm, The Weekend Australian Magazine, 24 June 2023

² Ibid

policymakers, and researchers, each with expertise and experience, to explore how collaboration and partnership can strengthen and sustain school food programs across Australia.

As we all know, food security is a significant and ever-growing challenge. Many families find that consistent access to healthy, affordable food is not guaranteed. Schools are environments where equity can be actively advanced.

It has been reported, I quote, “it is widely recognised that hungry children cannot learn effectively.”³ The positive impacts of school meal programs on educational attainment have been witnessed in school breakfast clubs in Australia and in the UK.⁴ Beyond providing nourishment, other benefits include opportunities for social support, safe spaces to foster connections with school staff, and improved learning and peer engagement.⁵

During my term as Governor, I have visited many schools across Tasmania. I have heard the constant concern that many children are not receiving adequate nutrition. Fortunately, many schools have breakfast clubs and are participating in the school lunch program. I have visited several schools participating in the program to hear about the experience of the children. We sat down to eat with them and heard how much they enjoyed helping prepare and eat the meals. They also enjoyed discovering different cuisines.

In 2023, to support the school lunch program, I was pleased to launch a garden at Government House in partnership with School Food Matters, Eat Well Tasmania and Loaves and Fishes. An area of land was identified to grow produce specifically for the School Food Matters lunch program. Our garden provides modest support with boxes of fresh produce collected weekly by Loaves and Fishes.

We shall shortly hear from Julie Dunbabin, who is the face behind our school lunch program. May I take this opportunity to congratulate Julie for her significant contributions to healthy eating in Tasmania and to the program.

³ Education and Equity in Times of Crisis: Learning Engagement and Support, Rudling et al, Palgrave McMillan, 2023 p105

⁴ Ibid p106

⁵ Ibid

May I also congratulate the organisers of this National School Food Summit and everyone involved in planning, preparing and providing school food programs.

May I also wish you well in your discussions, which have the potential to positively improve the lives of children and families across our country.

It is now my great pleasure to declare this National School Food Summit open.