

A reception to celebrate the successful outcome of the Macquarie Island Pest Eradication Programme, Wednesday, 9th April 2014

It is a great pleasure for me and my wife to welcome to Government House this evening a very diverse group of people. We have people here from Queensland, from New Zealand, and from even further afield - the Northern Territory. We have people from Canberra, and a dog trainer from New South Wales. There are people from the Antarctic Division at Kingston and helicopter pilots from Cambridge Airport and there are lots of officers from federal and state government departments. What an eclectic mix you are but everyone of you connected by your commitment to the successful completion of that wonderful operation the "Macquarie Island Pest Eradication Project.

I think that I am right when I say that the project had its origins more than eight years ago, but was finalised in 2006 when the Federal Minister for the Environment approved a plan developed by the Parks and Wildlife Service that had as its overall goal "eradication of rabbits and mice from Macquarie Island to enable restoration of the island's natural ecological processes including the recovery of plant and animal communities impacted by these feral species."

Of course such an ambitious plan required money as well as meticulous planning before it could be turned into a reality and that was committed in June 2007 in the sum of \$24.7 million through a State and Federal funding agreement.

For over 6 long years so many people, many of whom are here this evening, have worked on this massive project, either directly or indirectly by providing it with valuable support. I understand that it is the largest project to eradicate rabbits, black rats and house mice in the

world. The day before yesterday, I think it was we welcomed the eradication team back to Hobart and I think we can use, as did our local newspaper, an expression that has been used before, but in an entirely different context; "Mission Accomplished."

Macquarie Island is in many respects a good example of how badly humans can trash their natural environment and yet paradoxically, have the ability and capacity to restore it and thereafter seriously care for it. Although Macquarie Island is a hostile environment for humans and a long way from the sunshine of the Kingston Municipality - even though it is part of that Municipality - within 100 years of man first stepping onto Macquarie Island, its population of fur seals had been harvested to the point of extinction as had the elephant seals. The penguins were badly exploited and rabbits, feral cats, Maori hens, rats and mice - all introduced to the island by humans - had steadily destroyed the bird life and vegetation to such a degree that two species of endemic land bird are now extinct. Simply appalling!

However, using various methods you people set to work, first on the Maori hens and then the feral cats and lastly, the more difficult challenge; the rats, the mice and the rabbits. But you have demonstrated how mankind can reverse its depredations, revive that natural environment and properly care for it thereafter. As a result of your work a two-year careful searching and monitoring programme has detected no rabbits, no mice and no rats. More importantly, I am told that already there is evidence of an amazingly rapid recovery of some of the most palatable and visible plant species and some bird species such as blue petrels that were driven off the island have returned.

So all that really is something to celebrate and this evening my wife and I warmly congratulate everyone who played a part in this success story. Let us hope your work will provide a good role model and be replicated in other damaged areas of our planet.

So I invite you to join my wife in a toast to your success – a toast to Macquarie Island.