

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, TO OPEN THE 15<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF  
THE PARTNERSHIP FOR THE OBSERVATION OF THE GLOBAL  
OCEAN, WEDNESDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> JANUARY 2014.**

It is a privilege for me to be here this morning to open the 15<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Partnership for the Observation of the Global Ocean and an honour for all Tasmanians to be able to welcome to our beautiful island State so many distinguished scientists, who have come from about 20 countries around the world, to discuss matters that are vital to the survival of our planet.

Although Tasmania is Australia's smallest State with a population of only half a million people, the capital city of Hobart prides itself on being an important scientific centre for the Antarctic and the Southern Ocean. It is the supply base for the Australian and French bases in the Antarctic and, I might add, very keen to expand that work to include other countries. Hobart is also home to a critical mass of scientists engaged in global research in the fields of climate change and rising sea levels. The secretariat of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources is located here, and once a year Hobart welcomes hundreds of scientists from all around the world to the two-week annual CCAMLR meeting. In addition to the CCAMLR secretariat, the Australian Antarctic Division is located just south of Hobart, the CSIRO, a joint host of this conference, is situated on the Hobart waterfront, and next door to CSIRO the new building to house the University's Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, the other joint host, will be formally opened on Friday. The Tasmanian University is also host to the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre which, as you know, is a multidisciplinary partnership of 21 national and international organisations that provides science,

knowledge and understanding to help Australia meet the challenges of climate change.

I have to say that, at an international conference like this one, I worry about the problem of communication. I have always thought that, if you are brought up with English as your first language, you are both fortunate and lazy. Because English is spoken so widely, there is no strong compulsion for people like me to learn another language. It can be handicap. I well recall a judicial colleague of mine who was invited to give a paper at a conference in Japan about the importance of the judiciary and the courts being independent of the government. Because English was his first language he had to engage an interpreter to interpret his paper as he read it. Now, his interpreter advised him that it would be a good idea to incorporate a joke in his paper somewhere as she thought that the audience would like that. So, my colleague accepted that advice and told his audience an old joke about the deaf judge. Unfortunately, it was a rather long and complicated story but he managed to get through it and turn to the interpreter. She spoke only about half a dozen words and the audience erupted into laughter. Afterwards, my colleague thanked the interpreter and asked her how she managed to translate his joke with so few Japanese words, and she said "Oh, it was too long and complicated, so I just said to them that our distinguished guest has just told a joke, would you all please laugh?"

I am afraid that my background is the law and I have no qualification to speak to you this morning on any of the topics that you will be discussing. This is despite a recent visit that my wife and I made to the CSIRO and the new IMAS building where Dr Bruce Mapstone and

Professor Mike Coffin and some of their staff briefed us on the work that they are doing. As I said to them afterwards, it was one of the most interesting afternoons that we have had for a long time. We learnt about the seas being a truly global ocean and not, as I had been taught in school, several different oceans. We learnt that the ocean plays the most important role in shaping the earth's climate. We saw the devices that made possible extensive measurement of the seas' temperature and salinity; devices that could lower themselves to a predetermined depth to make their measurements and then rise, from time to time, to transmit the data via the satellite to the scientist's computer. And we also learnt a bewildering number of acronyms, such as JAMSTEC, SCOR and, of course, POGO!!

Although the Partnership for the Observation of the Global Ocean has been in existence for only 15 years, it has achieved a great deal. It has clearly demonstrated the need for international cooperation to measure and monitor that which will determine the future of our planet and, to meet this need, the partnership has grown to include 40 member institutions from 20 different countries. POGO has been able to minimize the imbalance in observing the ocean between the southern and the northern hemispheres. POGO has been instrumental in increasing the distribution across the globe of those clever little floats that so intrigue me, and has also been responsible for the establishment of OceanSITES to record variables from the surface down to the incredible depth of 5 kilometres. Over the past 15 years, through international scientific cooperation, POGO has got closer to the establishment of a comprehensive network of observational instruments that will criss-cross the world ocean; all this with the ultimate aim of

communicating the information, and the opinions based on it, to the policy makers and the general public to ensure that our planet will continue to sustain life as we know it.

So, it is important work that you have gathered here in Hobart to do, and it's no doubt past the time when I should stop talking and let you get on with it. But before I do, I would like to respectfully suggest to you that, as scientists, your work is of no use unless its import is conveyed to the decisions makers and the general public in a way that can be understood by non-scientifically trained minds. I will even be so bold as to suggest to you that the effective communication of your findings, and the impact they have on our climate and sea levels, are as important as the data itself. There is a great saying that all experts should bear in mind, "a word from the wise is of no use unless it is understood."

During my time as a judge of the Supreme Court of Tasmania, I listened to a lot of experts give evidence from the witness box. Some were skilled at communicating their expert opinions to lay people and could be understood, and some were not. I am confident that it is a skill that can be learned. Sometimes, the need to speak with absolute scientific precision must give way to the importance of communicating the essence of a scientific fact or opinion to the non-scientific mind. I found an excellent example of this amongst your material that I was reading to prepare for this morning. It was a piece about the importance of the Southern Ocean and the formation of cold bottom water in this ocean that is circulated around the world. There was a reference to rising sea water temperatures which I did not really follow until I read – quote – "... thus the Southern Ocean functions as an environmentally

sustainable giant air conditioner ...” Well, I understand the importance of an air conditioner, and the even greater importance of maintaining an air conditioner that is environmentally sustainable.

POGO’s Mission Statement concludes with a list of matters that the Partnership wants to promote, such as global oceanography and shared use of data information. Last on that list is “public outreach”. Of course, chronologically, public outreach should be listed last, but it certainly should not be seen as the least important matter for POGO.

But it is time I stopped talking to you about things you all know a lot more about than I do, and do what I am here to do, and that is to declare POGO 15 open and to wish you all a very productive and stimulating conference here in Hobart.

My wife and I look forward to seeing you all Government House this evening and hearing about the first day at the conference.