

**REMARKS AT A WELCOME CIVIC RECEPTION BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART TOWN HALL, THURSDAY 9 APRIL 2015**

Thank you very much, Lord Mayor, for that introduction with such kind words and for arranging this Welcome Civic Reception. Civic receptions for newly appointed Governors have been a traditional way for people to meet the Governor as well as to demonstrate loyalty to the Crown.

I note that, in January 1875, then Mayor George Crisp Esq. welcomed Governor Weld to the colony at a Civic Reception — probably a bit more formal and stuffy than this one. That event merited nearly a full page in the *Mercury*, and it was reported that His Worship said:

May it please Your Excellency, it is my pleasing duty as Mayor of the capital city of Tasmania, and on behalf of my brother aldermen and the citizenry generally, to welcome Your Excellency's safe arrival at the seat of your future Government. In bidding you welcome, I beg to assure Your Excellency of the satisfaction of the colonists at the choice Her Majesty has been advised to make of a Governor for this loyal colony.¹

The Mayor went on to read an Official Address of Welcome that almost exactly mirrored the words you just heard our Lord Mayor recite from the scroll.

I hope that the present 'colonists' are also satisfied with Her Majesty's appointment. I of course have not had far to arrive from. Far from coming from over the seas I had a 7000 Hobart postcode for the first 22 years of my life. My first home was just up the road in Macquarie Street and my second home, and my home until I was married, was in Davey Street. So I am very much 'home grown'. At the same time I am conscious that it is quite possible that many people are unaware that they have a new Governor, or if they are aware of this they probably have little idea who that Governor is. After the first 6 months of his tenure as Governor-General, the highly respected former High Court Judge,

¹ The Mercury, Thursday 14 January 1875, p 2

Sir William Deane, was unrecognised by 95% of Australians according to a national public opinion poll.² At the recent Aged Care Expo at the Derwent Entertainment Centre, I went up to chat to two occupants of one of the display booths only to be asked by one of them: ‘Who are you?’ — to the horror of her colleague, as I had just given a speech to open the Expo and been introduced as Governor. So I guess I have a pretty low profile. On Easter Monday we called in to see some friends at Orford and their 8 year-old grandchild was heard to say, ‘the Prime Minister is here’. And at the opening of the Wooden Boat Symposium, one of the international speakers referred to me as Empress – clearly there is some confusion about what the Governor is!

I am very conscious of the honour that has been bestowed upon me by my appointment as Tasmania’s 28th Governor and my husband Dick and I are looking forward to the opportunities and challenges before us. One of the things that has struck me about the role in these first four months has been the degree of flexibility in the role. A frequent response to my many questions to Government House staff is, ‘it’s up to you’. There are constitutional, ceremonial and community functions but the duties of Governor are not enumerated or fully explained in the Letters Patent or the Constitution. To some extent at least there is some freedom in defining the role. Even the constitutional and legal function is open to different interpretations in terms of what is the appropriate model: interventionist, benign mentor or mechanical idiot are three possibilities. And there is flexibility in relation to how the relationship with the Premier and Ministers should be developed. Without going into the details of this Constitutional and legal role, the overriding constitutional duty is to ensure the maintenance of our democratic parliamentary system of government. I sometimes think that is something that we take for granted. For many years we have had the stability and security to be able to exercise our right to vote and elect representatives that is not always the case in other countries.

The ceremonial role includes opening Parliament and swearing in Ministers, neither of which I have had to do yet. Nor have I officiated at an Investiture of Australian honours – although I have presided over a St John’s Investiture and have taken the salute at the Police Academy Graduation Ceremony, at the

² Peter Boyce, *The Queen’s Other Realms*, 2008, p 137.

Operation Slipper Parade at the Cenotaph in Hobart; and I have unveiled a plinth in memory of Corporal Baird at the Burnie Cenotaph. And I have cut my first two ribbons – one at the Penguin Cancer Council Relay for Life and one at the Burnie Cenotaph opening the new Memorial Walls.

But it is the community role which offers the most flexibility. Interacting with the community by visiting municipalities, addressing professional and charitable bodies, endorsing the worthy activities of community organisations and individuals who have performed or are performing laudable public service are all standard duties. Encouraging high levels of achievement in the arts, industry, education and sports is part of the community role. This is done by hosting receptions and handing out awards. So I have handed out prizes at the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and the Melbourne and Launceston to Hobart Races, and I have handed out awards and hosted receptions for the Governor's Environment Scholarships and the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority vocational and academic awards. And I am patron of some hundred or so organisations.

It has become accepted for Governors to speak out on issues of social justice or morality while avoiding direct criticism of government policy. Doing this calls for careful judgement. However, I see it as an important aspect of the Governor's leadership role in encouraging Tasmanians to be a caring society – caring for others and for the environment in which we live. Two of the social justice issues I plan to focus on are family violence and sexual violence. As a criminologist and law reformer I have always had an interest in both of these issues. Rosie Batty's selection as Australian of the Year has thrust the issue of family violence into the forefront of national consciousness. It is something that has been on the law reform agenda for at least thirty years and it now seems as if the community is listening and there is a growing momentum to attempt to change the underlying attitudes that allow this violence to be perpetrated, condoned and tolerated.

Sexual violence against women and children has also been recognised as a problem by law reformers for even longer than family violence. Law reformers have grappled with the problem of the underlying patriarchal attitudes which allow women to be raped, attitudes that suggest women ask for rape by their behaviour or dress, that sex is something men do to women and that passivity

is consent. The documentary *India's Daughter*, which was shown on ABC TV's Four Corners on Monday night³ demonstrates the attitudes that allowed four young men to rape Jyoti Singh, a 23 year-old female medical student in Delhi, who flouted convention by going home from a film with with a male friend who was not her relative after dark. The government's banning of the film appears to demonstrate the difficulty it has in confronting the fact that violence and prejudice against women is built into the social fabric. Recommendations to amend the criminal laws have been made – but experience has shown that changing underlying attitudes is much more difficult than changing the law.

Gender equality is also a matter that I want to promote and something I addressed in the three speeches I gave to commemorate International Women's Day.

Education and in particular the need to improve the education standards and achievements of Tasmanians is an issue of particular interest to me. I have agreed to Chair an Advisory Committee for the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, which has the goal of improving educational aspirations, participation and attainment in Tasmania.

I have mentioned caring for the environment. I am a keen bushwalker and would like to promote enjoyment of our national parks and reserves.

I am very conscious of the honour that has been bestowed upon me and I take the opportunity afforded by this Civic Reception to pledge to all of the people of Tasmania that I will carry out all of my duties to the best of my ability. My husband Dick and I are looking forward to the opportunities and challenges before us.

It is very humbling to be welcomed by so many of you and I thank you for taking the time to come and do that. I look forward to meeting and speaking with you tonight.

³ Four Corners, ABC 2, 6th April 2015.