

**AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATIONS  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA,  
BALL ROOM, GOVERNMENT HOUSE, MONDAY 8 JULY 2019**

Good evening and welcome to this reception for delegates attending the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations International Conference.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

May I acknowledge among you:

- Trish Van Galen, Scott Ambrose and Organising Committee members;
- Amanda Pentti and AFMLTA Executive members;
- MLTA State Presidents;
- Keynote speakers Rafael Nunez, Jane Simpson, Joseph Lo Bianco, John Hajek, Annie Reynolds.

This conference was last held in Tasmania in 1997 and so it is with much pleasure that Dick and I are able to host you here this evening.

One feature of receptions hosted by Governors, whether here or elsewhere, is that for academic conferences particularly there's a general rule that it's best for a Governor not to stray too far into the subject matter of a conference, for fear of demonstrating ignorance of the subject.

However, I can at least tell you that I am an enthusiastic supporter of modern language teaching for two reasons. The first is based on my personal experience. While Asian languages were commonly not offered in my school days, I did very much enjoy learning French and German and completed my A levels in these subjects in Matriculation, the equivalent of today's Level 3 in the Tasmanian Certificate of Education.

Even this limited study has been useful, particularly German as I have spent a number of periods of study leave in Germany and while my German was not up to me reading legal texts in German, my school girl German has proved very useful, shopping, finding my way around in very basic conversation. And I think I have given some pleasure and no doubt amusement to the occasional aged care residents of German background when I have endeavoured to speak with them in their own language.

The second reason for being so pleased to welcome you here this evening is that I do have some understanding of the advantages of learning a second language. First, widening cultural understanding and confidence – just so important in a country that seeks to embrace multiculturalism; secondly, improving literacy and thirdly, preparing students for work in a global world.

As to the second point, it now seems well established that learning a second language benefits students with their literacy skills as well as having other cognitive benefits. And I am sure you are well aware of the studies that support this. Certainly, it is something that should be more widely known.

There are no doubt barriers to encouraging students to study a second language in Australia – one of which is the misconception that if you speak English, you do not need to learn foreign languages as everyone speaks English.

And learning a second language has cognitive benefits for older people and is protective against dementia. I have just become aware that Libraries Tasmania plays a not insignificant role in languages learning, with a free service for its users to learn new languages through “Transparent Languages Online” and “Mango Languages”.<sup>1</sup> This will be something I will investigate when my term as Governor ends.

I am very pleased to see that your programme includes a presentation tomorrow from Theresa Sainty and Annie Reynolds, ‘What can we tell you? palawa kani language in lutrawita today’. Recently I heard Therese and Annie give a lecture to the Royal Society about palawa kani and the revival of Aboriginal language here on our island. I was fascinated and can highly recommend this session.

But that is enough from me. Many of you are visitors to Tasmania and so you are welcome to have a look at our beautiful State Rooms in this part of the building. This Government House was first occupied in 1858 and many of its furnishings and decorations are original, including the delightful little French Room, which I encourage you to seek out.

Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://libraries.tas.gov.au/information/Pages/eLanguages.aspx>, accessed 7 July 2019.