

THE TASMANIAN GOVERNANCE FORUM 2019
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
RACV HOBART APARTMENT HOTEL, HOBART
THURSDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2019

Thank you, Megan Motto, Conference Chair – and thank you Susan Bradbrook, State Manager, and colleagues for inviting Dick and me to join you today for the 2019 Tasmanian Governance Forum.

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.

Tackling the task of addressing you today about my vision for Tasmania, I did feel somewhat daunted. What are the opportunities and challenges facing us? How do we create a strong and sustainable Tasmania? A resilient community, a community of resilient people and organisations?

So many possible topics spring to mind: climate change, health, obesity, our ageing population, homelessness, youth unemployment, traffic, tourism, balancing conservation with development and so on. I plan to focus on education and literacy and then add some comments on primary health care and finish with some comments about reconciliation.

We are the poorest state economically.

Tasmania is experiencing strong economic growth but the fact remains we are still the poorest state. Despite strong growth there has not been an improvement in the living standards of the general population and for some there has been a decline in living standards. Problems include entrenched long-term employment; people cycling in and out of increasingly low secure, low paid and low skilled jobs and a mismatch of skills to the new jobs emerging.¹ Currently in Tasmania, some 120,000 people are living in poverty.

¹ Kym Goodes, 'Our states economic boom can be positive' The Mercury, 4 November 2019.

In August we learnt that Tasmania's youth jobless rate was the worst in the country at 12.3% and that in some parts of the State it was as high as 20%.

Some of the reasons for the relative poverty of Tasmania we cannot do much about, such as the higher proportion of the population that is over 65, and the fact that high level labour productivity industries such as mining and finance are under-represented in Tasmania.

But there is something we can do to increase levels of employment, hours worked and productivity, because there are unambiguous linkages between these factors and education level. Education is a driver of economic prosperity for individuals and for the economy.

So, what is the education situation in Tasmania?

- The percentage of Tasmanian adults who are functionally illiterate at 48% is 4 percentage points higher than the national average;
- A smaller proportion of Tasmania's population has a bachelor's degree or higher than any other State or Territory;
- Year 10-12 direct retention rates at around 73% (for 2018)² are improving but remain at 10% below the national average.
- Successful Year 12 completion rates are improving but remain at 18% below the national average.³
- NAPLAN results are poorer, e.g. in 2018 proportionally fewer Grade 3 children were above the minimum standard for reading, writing, spelling and grammar.

Education and Literacy

As the Chair of the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, I have embraced Peter Underwood's vision that "Education is the passport to a better life".

² <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/apparent-retention#View1> accessed 6 November 2019.

³ <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/year-12-certification-rates#view1> accessed 6 November 2019.

I would like to see higher levels of educational participation and attainment and its flow on effects to our economy and a great improvement in literacy and numeracy rates. It can unlock the potential that is dormant in our State.

We need intervention at multiple levels:

Babies and toddlers—

80% of brain development occurs in the first three years of life.

Research has shown that reading to babies as young as 6 months of age leads to larger vocabularies and better early literacy skills four years later, just as a child is getting ready for school. ‘Even though children may not be talking yet, that doesn’t mean they are not learning.’⁴ How often (quantity) and how vividly (quality) toddlers and adults engage in books together is related to early reading and writing skills.

And children’s literacy skills when they start school correlate to later reading success. These findings fit in with what we know about early language development. Reading aloud is a form of conversation and conversing with children is important. A seminal study by Betty Hart and Todd Risley found that in the first three years of life, some children heard 30 million more words than others, an advantage that translated by third grade into bigger vocabularies, better reading scores and higher test scores.⁵

In 2018, two teachers from Margate School attended a course at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Boston and learnt about a program called the Boston Basics. The Boston Basics are five evidence-based care-giving principles that encompass much of what experts find is important for children from birth to age three. The tenet is that every child from every background can benefit from the five principles. They embody simple messages that can be adopted by the whole community and publicised through posters in prominent places, on buses, with videos and so on.

The messages are:

- Maximise love, manage stress
- Talk, sing and point
- Count, group and compare
- Explore through movement and play
- Read and discuss stories.

⁴ Carolyn Cates, cited by Lydia Denworth, ‘The Magic of Reading Aloud to Babies’ *Psychology Today*, 5 may 2017.

⁵ Also quoted by Cates, n 1.

Channel Basics has attracted AEDC (Australian Early Development Census) funding and with a steering committee and partnerships with the Underwood Centre, the B4 Coalition and the Department of Education, will be launched in December. It is described as a 'collective impact project' designed to ensure that the community (the local community in the Channel and the wider community) understand the critical importance of the basics for a child's development in the first three years of life.

The teachers, Kate Slater and Maree Thompson, were inspired to do this program in the light of 2018 data for the Channel area showing that an increasing proportion of children were starting school with developmental delays and developmental vulnerability, and that, according to PIPS (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools) data, there were increases in the proportion of children achieving below the expected grade level in reading. It is also of concern that the gap between Tasmania and Australia in terms of the percentage of at-risk and vulnerable children on the language and cognitive skills domain is widening.⁶

This seems to be such a promising pilot with a strong evidence base; it aligns nicely with the Government's B4 Early Years Coalition agenda, Launch into Learning and the programs at our wonderful Child and Family Centres.

Primary and Secondary Schools

Though Rosie Martin's Chatter Matters, now Connect42, (I am patron of Connect42) I have attended two symposia and a day-long seminar which have focused on the problem of tackling our literacy problem. The first one ended with a resolution to strive for 100% literacy. There are experts out there who can help with this goal.

Because I tend to be outcome-focused I like to see concrete ways in which we can achieve that. I would love to see a trial of a literacy program, called Response to Intervention that uses speech pathologists in collaborative learning teams. It began at a Victorian Primary School, Mahogany Rise, in 2008 with

⁶ Peter Underwood Centre, 'Early Childhood Development' Fact Sheet (2019), https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1263572/Underwood-Centre-Fact-Sheet-One.pdf

https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1263572/Underwood-Centre-Fact-Sheet-One.pdf accessed 4 November 2019.

Foundation Students (Prep). At this small low SES school, 95% of students starting school have a language delay or impairment; close to 50% had been exposed to violence or alcohol or drug abuse in the home. The program which focuses on developing students' oral language skills has three tiers of support: Tier 1 is the whole-class language strategy; Tier 2 is targeted small groups and Tier 3 is individual (one-on-one) intervention for children with severe language delay.

Comparison with a control school demonstrated significant improvement in the Mahogany Rise children. It became a whole-of-school program in 2013.

All children improved significantly. The 2016 NAPLAN results showed Grade 5 students were above the Australian average in reading, writing and spelling and well above similar SES schools in the other domains (grammar and numeracy).

They were then tested at High School (Monterey Secondary College) in three areas of language: spelling, grammar and reading and it was found that their growth had plateaued. As a result, work on vocabulary (explicit vocabulary teaching) and comprehension was introduced at Monterey.

A new development is the State Government's plan to roll out a Year 1 phonics screening check, which provides critical insights to teachers on their students' sounding out aptitude. This is welcomed by Rosie Martin, who argues that a decades-long shift away from explicit teaching of sound/symbol correlation in favour of a whole language approach has failed many students.

Children's University

Children's University is an 'iconic project' of the Underwood Centre. It recognises the importance of learning outside the formal classroom setting and the importance of encouraging engagement in learning. Schools in lower SES areas in Tasmania have joined the programme which provides educational opportunities for 8-14-year-olds outside the school at a range of some 150 learning destinations including museums, sporting clubs and other organisations – even involving Children's University students in productions such as Rosehaven. Learning passports are stamped with hours of participation and students with a minimum of 30 hours are eligible to graduate. Graduation ceremonies are held in conjunction with University December graduations, with children wearing gowns and participating in the Town and Gown Parades in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie.

In 2018 we had 343 graduating students from 31 schools across the state.

Adult literacy

One of the outcomes of our low rate of functional literacy is that many parents are unable to read to their children or help them with their homework even if that helping means having the confidence to learn together.

In Tasmania we have a wonderful adult literacy program, 26Ten. This programme has now been running for almost 8 years and I have had the opportunity to see their literacy tutors at work with adult learners and to visit a workplace and speak to employees who have benefited from the programme by improving their numeracy skills, literacy and communication. 26Ten has 930 organisations and individual supporters and 1,333 people have volunteered and undertaken training to be a literacy tutor.⁷

When we travel around the state visiting workplaces and industries, one of the questions we now ask is, 'Do you have a literacy or numeracy problem with your employees?'. And we explain how 26Ten can help.

Early this year I launched a new 26Ten programme, the 26Ten Chat resource which encourages and empowers people to refer adults to literacy and numeracy support. This resource is necessary because of the sensitivity of the issue and difficulty of raising it with a person suspected of struggling with literacy or numeracy. It suggests ways of starting the conversation and following up with the person using five steps.

We need to value teaching as a profession more highly

Eddie Woo, an inspirational Maths teacher at Cherrybrook High School, and Australian Local Hero 2018, who has continued his advocacy work in teaching and learning, was advised as a student, not to choose teaching, that he had the ability to do better.

We need good teachers, and we need to value them more highly so that schools are an engaging place to be.

⁷ See their website at <https://26ten.tas.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx> accessed 6 November 2019.

We need more Tasmanians enrolling and graduating from Universities and achieving VET qualifications

At our last Advisory committee for the Underwood Centre, we had a presentation from Craig Barling, who is the Executive Director of Strategy and Planning at UTas, and he presented on planning new pathways to University (other than an ATAR score for example). He showed some very sobering projections of the gap in skills requirements in the future.

Higher Education: a key economic driver

I would like to see Hobart develop as a University town. I have spent some time in Freiburg and Oxford. In Freiburg, for example, 10% of its population are students; in Oxford it is 24%, one third of whom are born outside the UK.

I would like to see the student population increase to be a greater proportion of the Hobart population – made up of more local students going to University; particularly more interstate students and more international students. Currently many young people aspire to leave the state, to enrol in a University in Melbourne, Sydney or elsewhere. This is unavoidable when the course they want to do is not available here: veterinary science, physiotherapy, speech pathology and so on. But I would like to see more of our young people stay here if their course is available, at least for their undergraduate degree, and more interstate students come here to study. So it needs to be seen as THE place to study. At the same we need the whole community to embrace the University, for us all to see it as ‘our University’.

The University is looking to refresh its postgraduate offerings and to focus on shorter more professionally oriented degrees and areas where Tasmania has a distinctive environment to offer specialised courses, including environmental management, cultural and heritage tourism, marine and Antarctic studies. It also aims to be more responsive to the community in its educational offerings and to improve integration and collaboration with TasTAFE and industry, all of which I applaud.⁸

We need to attract and retain more 20 to 40-year-olds and to attract those who have left to return to counter our ageing population and all that means for our economy and institutions.

⁸ Amanda Ducker, ‘UTAS opens up to new world of possibilities’ The Mercury, 31 October, 2019,

The Antarctic and Southern Oceans Sector

As a counterpoint to our literacy and higher education deficits, Hobart has the greatest concentration of Antarctic and Southern Ocean scientists of the five Antarctic gateway cities in South America, South Africa and Australasia. There are some 855 employees in the ASO sector. We have the Australian Antarctic Division at Kingston; IMAS and the CSIRO at Castray Esplanade and CCAMLR, the Secretariat for the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic and Marine Living Resources in Macquarie Street. Each year I open the two week Scientific and Convention meeting which is attended by 300 marine scientists, resource managers and policy makers from around the world. There are 26 international delegations and the opening session with its simultaneous translation into the languages of the contracting parties, and the spectacle of the flags from each country fills me with pride that we are hosting this meeting.

Dental Health

The problem

Tooth decay is Australia's most prevalent health problem. At the same time it is the most preventable. And it is the most preventable of hospital admissions.

Tasmania has poorer dental health than most other states and territories with the highest rate of complete tooth loss, the greatest number of dentures, the highest average number of missing teeth and the greatest number of people who have not seen a dentist in the past five years.ⁱ

Rural Tasmanians experience poor oral health at significantly higher rates than people living in major centres. Across the nation there are almost three and half times less dentists in rural and remote areas. However, it is not just in rural and remote areas that Tasmanians experience poor dental health. Furthermore, poor dental health exacerbates social and economic disadvantage. Tooth loss is known to inhibit educational and employment opportunities and social interaction.

It follows that improving dental health of Tasmanians can reduce pressure on the health system and particularly reduce the number of hospital admissions.

Something is being done to address this problem, particularly to redress the barriers to accessing services for some rural Tasmanians. The Royal Flying Doctor Mobile Dental Care Program operates in Circular Head/Smithton; East Coast/Swansea, North East/Scottsdale and King and Flinders Island. It uses a fixed clinic model and a visiting service to schools and residential aged care providers. Currently the RFDS is waiting on the delivery of a purpose-built dental truck which will allow expansion of the service to more schools, aged care facilities and more remote communities. This will negate the need to move and set up valuable equipment such as dental chairs and sterilizing equipment. The truck will be ready for operation in early 2020.

The RFDS is not funded to provide the service in the south of the island, nor in the cities. There are of course public dental services provided at a cost that is significantly below private dental care but even such a modest cost can be an obstacle. Moreover, once teeth are neglected, many procedures can be required to restore a person to good dental health. Poor dental health also has implications for diet and can contribute to obesity problems.

RFDS is addressing the problem of dental hygiene education by a web-based Oral Health Curriculum Program for primary students.

I would like to see the mobile dental truck service expanded to all our Child and Family Centres. These wonderful centres combine a range of support services for young families and their parents. Child care support could be provided while parents access the treatment.

Primary Production

Agriculture made up \$1.6 billion of the gross state product in 2017-8 or about 5% of it. This represented annual growth of 9% indicating we are on track to meet the State Government's Agrivision 2050 Strategy of lifting the annual gross value of agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050. With the world's population forecast to increase from 7.5 billion to 10 billion by 2050, food security is an issue and Tasmania is well placed to assist.

As well as dairy and beef, we need to continue to concentrate on high value, low volume products that overcome disadvantages of small scale and geographic distance from markets: Salmon, oysters, wine, spirits, craft beers, fruit: cherries and raspberries. Innovative ways of presenting produce are needed such as

freeze drying. And we should continue to capitalise on Brand Tasmania's vision with such concepts as paddock to bottle and paddock to plate.

We will need:

- direct air links to the Asian markets to remove a barrier to entry to these markets by removing the need to trans-ship;
- a more highly educated and skilled workforce; continued development of vocational and University training will be necessary.

Reconciliation with our First Peoples, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community

I began with an acknowledgment of the traditional and original owners of the land, the palawa people of lutrawita/trowunna Tasmania. I would like to see much greater progress towards reconciliation, for us to move beyond apology.

I profoundly lament the fact that the traditional owners of the land in Hobart, the muwinina people, have no descendants due to invasion, dispossession and violence. And I also lament the fact that our early Governors were implicated in all of this and not just implicated, were central to that history of wrongdoing. That George Augustus Robertson convinced Aborigines to give themselves up with a broken promise that they would go to Wybalenna for a short period, later to return to their land. And then they were sent to Oyster Cove, to a condemned penal station, where they eventually perished.

Despite the fact that there were survivors in the children and grandchildren of the Aboriginal women of the North East nation and their Straitsmen partners in the Bass Strait Islands, their survival and existence as Aboriginal people was denied. But survive they did with amazing resilience along with their cultural, linguistic and spiritual traditions as is beautifully explained by Dr Patsy Cameron in her book, *Grease and Ochre*. From these ancestors we are now blessed with a thriving Indigenous community and Tasmania is enriched by their many contributions.

Aboriginal culture is being revived and celebrated through such events as the annual Mannalargenna Day at Tebrakunna, Cape Portland; the Kooparooon Niara Cultural Trail at Deloraine on the banks of the Meander River which shares history and knowledge about bush tucker and native vegetation with the wider community; the award winning wukalina/Bay of Fires walk that is designed to deepen understanding of palawa culture; through exhibitions such as Julie Gough's Tense Past exhibition at TMAG which has just completed its five-month

run; through the revived and reconstructed language palawa kani and the revival of the languages of the four tribes of the South of the State by SETAC; dual naming and other initiatives such as the Education Department's project, the Orb, an online media resource designed to assist the teaching of Aboriginal histories and culture as a culture informed by the past but evolving.

For this year's NAIDOC Week the themes were Truth, Voice and Treaty. In the Tasmanian context 'truth' requires a much broader and wider understanding of historical truths, the Frontier Wars, the massacres and the disasters which were Wybalenna and Oyster Cove. And a much wider understanding is needed of the story of survival of their many descendants and their culture.

Voice and Treaty requires even more. Revisiting the concept of voice after the rejection of the Uluru Statement of the Heart and work towards a treaty. This idea is gaining traction in Tasmania with a forum in August at the Town Hall which was addressed by Dr Patsy Cameron and Professor Tim McCormack. There are many different Aboriginal groups and organisations that need to be involved as well as the rest of the Tasmanian community and Reconciliation Tasmania is working towards this.

So what would or could be involved in a treaty? Recognition of cultural rights is a possible area for discussion. Dr Emma Lee has been working on Indigenous commercial fishing rights extending the currently recognised non-commercial cultural fishing rights.

Macquarie Point

I would like to see this as a reconciliation themed park, recognising Aboriginal culture and the frontier wars. I would like to see this as a war memorial to Tasmania's Black Wars during which hundreds of Aborigines and White settlers lost their lives. It was I think the most intense frontier conflict in Australia's history. In years to come I hope this is part of Anzac Day commemorations.

More bi-partisan policy making

I would like to see government engaging in more bipartisan policy making, less populist policies including costly policies such as tough on crime which drive up imprisonment rates with no community benefit in terms of making society safer. The money saved could be spent on social and affordable housing and education.

My brief to you included talking about personal resilience as well as community and institutional resilience. I have not touched upon the personal. Thinking about our future, the challenges as well as the opportunities can be very confronting. I am just going to finish with a quote which for me is comforting:

I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do. [Edward Everett Hale].

Thank you.

ⁱ RFDS Tasmania, Briefing Paper, 2019.