

**WELCOMING REMARKS AT A RECEPTION IN HONOUR OF
M. JEAN LEQUES, MAYOR OF NOUMEA, BY THE
HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC, GOVERNOR OF
TASMANIA, SWANSEA WEDNESDAY 22nd FEBRUARY 2012**

It is a great pleasure and a privilege for me and my wife to welcome you Monsieur Le Maire, your wife Evelyne, your adult children and their partners, Monsieur Jacques-Olivier Leques, Monsieur Jacky & Madame Jacqueline Calvet, and Monsieur Robert & Madame Brigitte Laubreaux. And an equally warm welcome to Monsieur Marc Trouyet, Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of France in Canberra. I am very pleased to welcome you all to Tasmania and to Swansea in particular.

C'est un grand plaisir et un privilège pour moi et ma femme de vous accueillir Monsieur le Maire et votre famille en Tasmanie et en Swansea en particulier. Now, I am afraid that has exhausted my French vocabulary but in case some of our visitors only speak French, a French language version of my remarks has been prepared and given to them. All of this reminds me of a friend of mine who gave an address at a conference to some Japanese delegates. He had a translator to translate his speech as he went along. He had been told that the Japanese enjoy a joke so he told one at the beginning of his talk. It was a rather long and complicated joke but the translator managed to translate it with very few words; so few that afterwards my friend asked him how he was able to translate a rather long joke with so few words. The translator said to him, "Oh I thought that they wouldn't understand the joke as it was too complicated so I told

them that the distinguished speaker has just made a joke and would they all please laugh now – which they did!”

Monsieur Le Maire I understand that this visit has been a long time coming – 25 years to be precise for I was told that in 1987 you decided that you would visit Tasmania with a view to establishing a sister city relationship with a city in this State. However, bushfires in the State meant that you were advised to visit somewhere else in Australia and so you went to the Gold Coast of Queensland instead of the East Coast of Tasmania and established a sister city relationship with that region.

However, you are here at last and very welcome too. My wife and I actually feel that we know you even though we have never met, as the energetic and enthusiastic Mayor Bertrand Cadart, has spoken of you and of Noumea many times and of course we will never forget the wonderful visit made by that group of 11 smiling children from Montravel School in your city together with their teachers and accompanying adults. It brought tears to our eyes to see them dancing and singing on the stage at Government House – film of which I have no doubt you have seen. This is a good opportunity to say that we are very grateful for the financial assistance that your city gave to make that visit possible. It was a good investment in the future of your city to give these young citizens an opportunity to travel as they did and broaden their horizons.

As well as Monsieur Cadart talking to us about Noumea all the time, the biennial “From France to Freycinet Festival” keeps your beautiful island to the forefront of our minds. So, Monsieur Le Maire, although this is your first visit to Tasmania you come to us as an old, a valued and a very welcome friend.

If I may say so New Caledonia and Tasmania have a lot in common. We are both island people and although Tasmania’s population is about twice that of your country both could be described as having a small population with all the advantages and sometimes the problems that go with that. Your country is formally divided into three regions, the North, the South and the Loyalty Islands. So too is Tasmania, albeit not formally, but often so regarded as being divided into the North, the South and the North West. The original indigenous owners of both New Caledonia and Tasmania were invaded by a colonial power who used the land to establish a penal colony and whose presence remains today; indeed as Governor of Tasmania I am a representative of the Queen of England and Australia. Of course, in your country proportionally there are more citizens with an indigenous lineage than there are inhabitants with a non-indigenous lineage, but none-the-less we share a similar historical background which is fertile ground on which to plant a sister city relationship that will grow strong cultural and economic ties in the future. There are already strong bilateral relations between your country and mine. Trade between New Caledonia and Australia is well established and promoted by the Australia – New

Caledonia Business Council and a sister city relationship between Noumea and a municipality or city in Tasmania would be able to build on those business connections and see the development of cultural - art and music - connections as well as the tourism industry leading to a better understanding between two peoples with a common background.

Monsieur Leques, as Governor of Tasmania I not only welcome you and your family and colleagues to Tasmania but I also encourage your efforts and those of Monsieur Cadart in laying the foundations of such a long term relationship.

