

POLAND INDEPENDENCE DAY 100TH ANNIVERSARY
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, TUESDAY 13TH NOVEMBER 2018

Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the 100th Anniversary of Poland regaining independence.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land— the Mouheneener 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:

- Dr Elzbieta Chelkowska, Vice President of the Polish Association in Hobart;
- Ed Kremzer, Honorary Consul for the Republic of Poland Tasmania.

This past Sunday the 11th November Armistice Day commemoration was particularly significant, across the world, given it is now one hundred years since that day the guns fell silent in Europe, to end World War One.

For Poland this is an equally memorable occasion, with November the 11th being the 100th Anniversary commemoration of your Independence Day, when once again Poland became an independent nation and whose borders could again be drawn on the map of Europe, as a free and independent Poland.

There can be few peoples whose entire country was eliminated for well over a century and yet was able to be reconstituted. I refer of course to the partitioning of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary and the termination of the Commonwealth's independent existence in 1795, leading to 123 years of official non-existence, in a geographic sense.

This tells us how strong and enduring cultural identity is, in not necessarily requiring borders to maintain cohesion, but in a sense of belonging and an undimmed desire to reunify.

The arrival in Tasmania of the first post-World War Two group of some 280 Poles in 1947 (soldiers from the Carpathian Brigade) was a trial to see if settlers from Europe could be assimilated into the Tasmanian workforce and society, and the success of their settlement became the catalyst for many more migrants to settle in Tasmania.

From a former colleague at the University of Tasmania, Ryszard Piotrowicz, I learnt that many Polish soldiers also settled in Scotland after the war. Ryszard arrived at the University in the 1990s – to our surprise with a broad Scots accent! His father had been evacuated with Polish troops after the fall of France in World War 2 to Scotland, where he stayed after the War because of the Soviet occupation of Poland. It was not until 1989 that Poland once again became a sovereign and free nation.

I understand that the most recent Census indicates there are some 3,500 people of Polish descent living in Tasmania; but that this number may be quite conservative given there are now great-grandchildren of those original 1947 to 1950's settlers who may not have full knowledge of their heritage, and so would not necessarily cite it for a Census. This is not untypical for a country like Australia, which with the singular exception of our Indigenous peoples is a nation built on migration, from all parts of the world and with all manner of motivations for wanting to come here, or primarily to escape oppression elsewhere.

The fact remains that the Tasmanian Polish community, after seventy years is as vibrant as any other cultural community in the island. And this was no doubt amply illustrated last Sunday at your wreath-laying ceremony at the Polish Corner, followed by the "Polish Day" in the Hall featuring Polish music, food, dancing and other activities.

Dick and I were in the north of the State, as it happens, attending a Centenary of Armistice Commemoration Service in Longford, along with a raft of other Vice-Regal commitments in the Municipality of Northern Midlands.

So it has been a memorable weekend for us too, and now with this reception we can continue the centenary flavour!

Congratulations to all of you, here and elsewhere, who are Poles or descendants of Poles and who proudly celebrate your 100th Anniversary as a free and independent nation.

Please now do enjoy the reception.

Thank you.