

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA AT ROWING TASMANIA'S
CENTENARY DINNER AND AWARD CEREMONY,
TATTERSALL'S PARK FUNCTION CENTRE, SATURDAY 28TH
APRIL 2012.**

Thank you very much for inviting me to this gala dinner to celebrate 100 years of Rowing Tasmania. I have to confess that although I was in the Royal Australian Navy for a short while, my rowing history is confined to my days at the Launceston State High School. When I was there the School boats comprised one rather antiquated eight and one even more antiquated quad. We quickly learned that the trick about training on the Tamar was to make sure that you didn't put too much effort in going downstream with the outgoing tide because the trip back against the tide required double the effort. In the case of the Launceston High School quad a leaking seam could be guaranteed to provoke increased effort after about 30 minutes on the water to make sure that we got back to the sheds before the boat filled up. Of course all of that was in the days long before carbon shells and all that fancy gear that you have today.

Well, a centenary celebration is an occasion to look back and reflect on the past and in doing so I found that rowing in this State has a history that goes back *more than 100 years*. Indeed, there are records of hotly contested races being held just a few years after Hobart Town was settled by white men between boats manned by the crews of visiting ships and local boats and crews. And they

certainly were tough races in those days as the boats were no racing shells but heavy clinker built whalers and gigs.¹

But as competitive rowing was alive and well as long ago as the 1820's I asked myself if it might not be said that this centenary dinner celebration is being a little bit late – perhaps more than 80 years too late. So the research continued and after a while a familiar and recognisable theme appeared to explain why this celebration in the year 2012 marks only the 100th anniversary of rowing in Tasmania.

Now, the fact of the matter is that rowing clubs were established both in the north and in the south of the State close to 150 years ago and regular regattas held in both Launceston and Hobart. However, you probably will not be surprised to learn – as some things never change – that prior to 1912 rowing in Tasmania as a formal sport became plagued by bitter rivalry ... between the south and the north. In 1900 the Tasmanian Rowing Association (TRA) was formed in Launceston and invited the Derwent Rowing Club to join, but the latter refused (citing the distance it would have to travel to meetings) and instead formed the Southern Tasmanian Rowing Association (subsequently renamed the Tasmanian Rowing Union, TRU) – so that suddenly there were two entities purportedly representing rowing in Tasmania.

¹ Young, David, *Sporting Island: a History of Sport and Recreation in Tasmania*, Hobart, Sport & Recreation Tasmania, 2005, pp 9-10.

Interstate rowing bodies refused to allow two Tasmanian boats to represent the State. In the end “Both the TRA in Launceston and the TRU in Hobart accepted that it made sense for the representative crew to be the best that the state could put together, rather than [sending to compete] a specifically northern or southern crew. They therefore decided on the following compromise. Firstly, the TRA and the TRU would divide control of rowing in Tasmania between them, with a parallel of latitude passing through Oatlands marking the boundary.” (It is a familiar tale isn’t it?) “Secondly, that they would conduct a North v. South race each year, with the winner having control of rowing in Tasmania for the following twelve months. Thirdly, that the winner would pick the crew for the interstate Champion Eight-Oared Race, having regard to the best available talent throughout the island. Those points agreed to, the two organisations buried the hatchet to a certain extent and each graced the other’s regattas with their presence.”²

This uneasy compromise persisted until 100 years ago when the Examiner newspaper was able to report; “After a long period of wrangling, the rival rowing associations composed their differences, and we have now a Tasmanian Rowing Association controlling the sport throughout the island. The union which has taken place has given undoubted satisfaction to the sporting public, and will prevent any of those competitions for supremacy between the two bodies of

² Op. cit. pp. 123-4.

oarsmen who should be united to uphold the credit of the state. When the question of welding the divergent interests into one supreme organisation was approached in a fair and sportsman like frame of mind, the difficulties were overcome, and it is to be hoped that in future there will be a closer recognition of the motto 'Union is strength'."³

And so a unified State rowing association was born 100 years ago this month; first called the Tasmanian Rowing Council and later known as Rowing Tasmania. I don't know about the survival of the motto "Union is Strength" as I can't find it on your web site today, but there is no doubt that the amalgamation of the north and south rowing and the abolition of the Oatlands' divide has led to strength in the sport of rowing in Tasmania over the last century. So tonight I say congratulations Rowing Tasmania, happy birthday and I wish you another successful 100 years.

And before presenting some awards I would also like to congratulate those six Tasmanian rowers who have been selected to row for Australia later this year at the London Olympics. It's a tremendous achievement and I would like to name them: Kerry Hore, Dana Faletic, Kate Hornsey, Anthony Edwards, Sam Beltz, and Scott Brennan.

I also understand that Tom Gibson may yet qualify; and congratulations as well to coaches Brett Crow and John Driessen.

³ The Examiner, Monday 22nd April 1912, p 4.

Finally I welcome and extend congratulations as well to six interstate rowers who have been training in Tasmania for the Olympics and are with us here this evening: Ben Curetin, Tod Skipworth, Daniel Noonan, James McRae, Chris Morgan, and Karsten Forsterling.