

**OPENING OF THE INAUGURAL SUPER SCIENCE FELLOWS
SYMPOSIUM BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD
AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA AT THE HOBART FUNCTION
& CONFERENCE CENTRE WEDNESDAY, 18TH APRIL 2012**

I feel honoured and privileged to be here today and to have been asked to open this, the inaugural Super Science Fellows Symposium, and to welcome to Tasmania so many very distinguished scientists, gathered together in Hobart to showcase the cutting edge scientific work that is being done in Australia today.

As a lawyer by trade I regret that my background in astronomy and space science research is limited to the delivery of a short speech to open a new radio telescope here in Hobart in February 2010 that is operated by the University of Tasmania for Auscope, and the delivery of an even shorter speech to open the 2010 Annual Scientific Meeting and General Meeting of the Astronomical Society of Australia being held here at the University.

I thought that I had better be up front and outlined my limited knowledge of matters scientific to those who organised this important Symposium. Indeed, to make up for my shortcomings in this respect I did suggest to them that this morning I could deliver my 3-hour treatise on the Importance of the Rule of Law and a short history of the development of the Independence of the Judiciary – always a favourite with the law students you know – but I think that that idea must have gone down like a lead balloon for although I

carefully searched your programme when it arrived I didn't see my name listed anywhere as a presenter!

In May 2009 the Federal Government of Australia, through the Australian Research Council, announced the creation of a new Super Science Fellowship Scheme. As you know this significant development introduced a Scheme that offered three-year Fellowships to the country's best young scientists to participate in science engagement and education activities. Pursuant to the adoption of this Scheme Fellowships were offered in three areas of existing research strength:

1. Space science and astronomy;
2. Marine and climate science; and
3. Future industries research - biotechnology and nanotechnology.

Almost all of the funds allocated for the Super Science Fellowships in those three areas are for research infrastructure that will make a lasting contribution to Australian science. The Government's investment in the Super Science Fellowship Scheme was said to be designed to stimulate economic activity, support new jobs and build the platform for high-skill, high-wage jobs in the future.¹

¹ <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Science/ResearchInfrastructure/Pages/SuperScience.aspx> accessed 7th March 2012.

This initiative is a tremendous acknowledgment of the importance of encouraging the country's best young brains to use their talents for the benefit of mankind. At the beginning of this year I was at an award ceremony for high secondary education achievers and spoke about the importance of encouraging the young intellectual stock of our country. I referred to an essay written by Professor A C Grayling when he was Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, the University of London. The essay is entitled "Excellence".² Professor Grayling began his essay by referring to the English poet Matthew Arnold and Arnold's description that the pursuit of excellence in the fostering of culture was "getting to know" on all the matters that most concern us, the best that has been thought and said in the world, and through this knowledge, turning a stream of free and fresh thought upon our stock notions and habits. And I thought that's right isn't it? The pursuit of excellence does indeed involve getting to know the best that has been said and thought in the world on all the matters that concern us most. I think it is also right that the *value* of pursuing excellence arises out of the fact that those who pursue excellence make an enormous contribution to their society and culture by using what they have learned to stimulate free and fresh thought on established notions and habits, thus promoting change and development for the better.

² Meditations for the Humanist: Ethics for a secular age; AC Grayling Oxford University Press (USA), 2003 ISBN-13 978-0-19-5-516890-7.

The Super Science Fellowship Scheme is a programme that encourages the pursuit of excellence first, by learning all that has been said and written about - in this case - space science and astronomy and then going a step further and by research, *increasing* the existing intellectual stock of knowledge. The sharing of that new knowledge is likely to be contagious and promote further research and development, all of which will be used, as Professor Grayling said, to turn a stream of free and fresh thought upon our stock notions and habits again - in this case - in the field of space science and astronomy.

In his essay Professor Grayling points out that a hindrance to the encouragement and development of high achievers is the notion that a democratic society is obliged to treat everybody the same. But the plain fact is that we are not all the same and I do not believe that everybody should be treated the same for to do so hinders the pursuit of excellence and the quest for knowledge by those who have the capacity and the intellectual ability to do so successfully to the ultimate benefit of us all.

I am not saying that some human beings should be valued less or more than others. Far from it; every one of us is of equal worth and value whatever our talents and capacities may be, and in a democratic society that means everyone should be treated *fairly*. But treating everyone fairly is quite different from treating everybody equally or the same.

It is fair that those who suffer from, or are born with a disability of some kind be provided with treatment, facilities and advice to minimise the impact of their disability and thus narrow the gap, so far as possible, between the able and the disabled. That is a proposition that is well recognised in our society. But is it not equally fair to provide the high achievers, the intellectuals, with funds, equipment and support to enable them to pursue excellence? Grayling argues that democracy should not eschew excellence and should not reduce everyone to the same level. He writes, and I quote, “[democracy] should aim to raise them, ambitiously and dramatically, as close as possible to an ideal.”

It is my understanding that the Super Science Fellowship Scheme embraces that philosophy. It encourages those who have the requisite intellectual capacity and the intellectual curiosity and stamina to pursue excellence to the extreme degree. Success in that pursuit will indeed, turn a stream of free and fresh thought upon our stock notions and habits and thus be of great benefit to mankind. I congratulate the Government on its initiative and I congratulate each of you who were appointed Super Science Fellows and wish you well in your pursuit of excellence and in your work at this Symposium that I now have pleasure in formally declaring open.

