

**TAKARA WARANTA/WALK WITH US COMMUNITY EVENT
OFFICIAL OPENING SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
PUNCHBOWL RESERVE, LAUNCESTON, SATURDAY 15 FEBRUARY**

Good afternoon. Thank you very much to Fiona Hughes and Bill Lawson, co-chairs of Reconciliation Tasmania, for inviting me to this event.

Thank you Aunty Dawn Blazely for your welcome to country. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the palawa people. I lament the fact that there are no descendants of the muwinina, the traditional owners of the land where I now live and Government House stands.

One of the highlights of my now more than five years as Governor has been engagement with our Aboriginal people. Significant events have been the amendments to the preamble to Tasmanian Constitution, which acknowledged the Aboriginal People as Tasmania's First People and the traditional owners of Tasmanian lands and waters and enduring spiritual, social, cultural and economic importance of the land and water to Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

Giving Royal Assent to this amendment happened in a ceremony in the Ball Room at Government House in June 2016 with many members of the Aboriginal community present.

And just last year we had a ceremony to mark the raising of the Aboriginal Flag at Government House as a permanent installation. It was a ceremony of poetry, dance and song. And it ended with us sharing food produced by the Palawa Kipli Caterers in collaboration with our Executive Chef Ainstie Wagner and her staff.

Permanently flying the Aboriginal flag is an acknowledgment that our history did not begin with the first European settlement at Risdon Cove in 1803, nor earlier in 1642 with Abel Tasman's sighting of Tasmania and naming it Van Diemen's Land. It is an acknowledgment that it begins long ago, more than

40,000 years ago, before Tasmania was an island when it was inhabited by our First People and that Aboriginal Tasmanians occupied, nurtured and managed this land for millennia.

In addition to these ceremonial events I have attended many Aboriginal community events including, on three occasions, the wonderful Mannalargenna Day (of which I am patron) held each year on the first Saturday of December.

In 2017 I attended and spoke at the opening of the permanent exhibition at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, *The First Tasmanians: Our Story*. This is a wonderful educational resource which explains Aboriginal history and the richly creative and ancient cultural practices of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, highlighting the fact that this is a culture that dates back 40,000 years. It throws a spotlight on the Aboriginal families and their way of life pre-contact and colonisation.

In fact there are far too many events to describe to you: an Indigenous Fisheries Workshop on the Tasman Peninsula; a Cygnet First Nations Event; a smoking ceremony led by Jim Everett to cleanse the Orphan School at St Johns Park, for the opening ceremony of Kickstart Arts. The Orphan School was the institution where Aboriginal children such as Mathinna and Fanny Cochrane Smith lived and so many Aboriginal and white children perished; visiting the Kooparooona Niara Cultural Trail at Deloraine on the banks of the Meander River, a trail which shares history and knowledge about bush tucker and native vegetation with the wider community; in September last year, at the Medical Science precinct at the University in Hobart, the opening of a permanent timeline installation tracing the story of the palawa people and the impacts of change to their health and traditions - a way of acknowledging the Aboriginal community and its continuing contribution to the broader community.

I have had the wonderful experience of walking to the Riveaux Cave where we saw the ochred hand stencils many thousands of years old and walking through the bush with elders I gained a better understanding that for Aboriginal people cultural heritage and natural environment are one without

the separation that non-Indigenous people make between cultural and natural values.

I am proud to be with you today to walk with you in this beautiful reserve, to watch and participate in the cultural activities. I am particularly looking forward to watching Nanette Shaw demonstrating kelp basket making and telling her about our last Government House open day when one of our Aboriginal National Park rangers led very successful kelp basket making classes where I managed to make a kelp basket which I must admit is a sad contrast to the beautiful basket Nanette gave me some years ago and which is displayed on the shelf in my office at Government House.

It is tragic how little Tasmanians know about our Aboriginal people. We remember at most what we did to the Aboriginal people, not nearly enough about who they were before the genocide, how they lived their lives, or how that culture managed to survive through the descendants of the Aboriginal women of North East nation.

Our education curriculum has neglected these issues. In Primary Schools there is in Maggie Walter's words, 'the pretty stuff' such as twine and kelp basket making, and in Secondary, if anything too much repetition of the Black Wars and not nearly enough about the deep 40,000 years of culture.

There are optimistic signs that this is changing. In addition to examples such as the QVMAG's First Peoples' exhibition and the Education Department's project The Orb, an online media resource designed to assist the teaching of Aboriginal histories and culture as a living culture, informed by the past but evolving. The huge attendance at Reconciliation Breakfasts over the last two years is also promising in terms of broad community engagement with Aboriginal issues. And the proliferation of events such is also evidence of change and I am delighted to be part of it all.

Thank you.