

TERROR AUSTRALIS READERS AND WRITERS FESTIVAL
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
CYGNET TOWN HALL FRIDAY 1 NOVEMBER 2019

Good morning and thank you very much for inviting Dick and me to attend the opening of the inaugural Terror Australis Readers and Writers Festival.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land — the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

This acknowledgment is particularly relevant at this literary event given the work SETAC is doing on reconstructing the South East Nation language of the four tribes in the south of the state, the Melukerdee people of the Huon River, the Lyluequonny people of the Far South, the Nuenonne people of Bruny Island and the Mouheneenner people of Hobart.¹

Many congratulations to Dr L J M Owen and her energetic committee colleagues for bringing this unique festival into reality. There are successful regional models to follow – Alice Springs, Byron Bay, Hay, Ubud – but even so, to initiate an event of this kind in southern Tasmania is delightfully bold. And as the island’s first female Governor I’m thrilled to be able to be opening a literary festival focused resolutely on female crime and mystery writers, hence the title “Murder She Wrote”, inspired by the one and only Agatha Christie.

Equally innovative and important are the concurrent programs: “Inspire the Love of Reading”; and “Trail of Writers’ Tears – Food, Wine and Books”.

Some of you will know that one of my personal and most fulfilling roles as Governor is in utilising this position to encourage reading from a very young age, and also literacy beyond the classroom. I do this in my work as Chair of the Advisory Committee of the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational

Attainment; and through a close working relationship with 26TEN since its early years. Indeed just over a week ago Dick and I hosted a 26TEN Week function at Government House.

So it's really good to know that this festival aims to "Inspire the Love of Reading" through the Hall of Writers Book Fair where we are gathered here in the Town Hall. As L J has said, the aim is community-driven with a committed purpose, given that the functional literacy rate in this region, as elsewhere in Tasmania, is just 50%.

It's fitting that 26TEN, Tasmania's campaign for adult literacy and numeracy, is presenting the Hall of Writers. It's a way of letting people know that while almost half of all Tasmanians struggle with reading and writing, it's never too late to learn, whether you are 17, 37 or 70. It's a way of letting people know that free, private help is available.

It's also fitting that 26TEN is presenting the Hall of Writers because the Huon Valley is a 26TEN Community – one where everyone works together to lift literacy and numeracy. In the Huon, the Council, local businesses like Duggans Construction and Tierney Law, government agencies such as the libraries, and community organisations like the Geeveston Community Centre and the Community Hub here in Cygnet, are all contributing.

In a 26TEN Community it is easy to ask for help because people understand there are many reasons why reading and writing skills might not be as good as you would like, there are plenty of people who can help, and there are events like the Terror Australis Festival to inspire a love of reading and writing.

The Festival has another excellent community purpose and that is to do what it can to help local businesses in their recovery phase following the January bushfires. This is commendable. As well all know too well, bushfires tear through communities at great speed; the recovery generally takes years. To be able to demonstrate a commitment to this Huon Valley recovery through a love of reading is, for me, remarkable and greatly to be admired.

In my own youth I loved reading [name some authors?] and made sure to instil that in my two daughters when they were young; just as they have done with their own children.

Indeed our daughter Meg became a published author earlier this year with her first novel *The Sparkle Pages* published by Penguin Random House – and although there’s no crime in it there certainly is a bit of sex-based passion and guilt and some rather frank associated descriptions and, for quite some time, Dick was unable to read past the first few pages!

Be that as it may, we who love and cherish fiction – for young people, for adults, in any genre – have I think something of a friendly duty to encourage reading in those who might have little or no interest in it.

And I will conclude on this related note, by observing that not many years ago the printed novel was said to be in dire straits due to the emergence of e-books and social media and so on. Well, book sales have bounced back; authors are as in demand as ever; book clubs are thriving; avenues for print publication and publicity have broadened; and, with Tasmania recognised as a significant international tourist destination, the decision to create this biennial festival in Cygnet, as a Huon Valley cultural event drawing eminent national authors, is greatly to be admired – and promoted now and into the future.

I therefore very happily declare the inaugural Terror Australis Readers and Writers Festival launched.

Thank you.

¹ <https://setac.org.au/regional-groups-to-be-consulted-on-dual-naming/>, accessed 29 October 2019.