

**A WELCOME BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD  
AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA TO A JOINT MEETING OF  
UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA AND THE UNIVERSITY  
CHANCELLORS' COUNCIL, GOVERNMENT HOUSE,  
WEDNESDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2013<sup>1</sup>**

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome such a distinguished group of Australian Academic leaders to Government House for this the seventh annual meeting of the Chancellors and Vice Chancellors of Universities Australia. I must confess to a little envy when I see you coming together like this on a regular basis for my experience of attending many Supreme and Federal Court Judges annual conferences has made me well aware of the high value of meetings like this at which knowledge, common to like institutions, is shared and developed, both in and out of formal sessions. You would think that Governors would be able to organise themselves to do the same thing wouldn't you - especially as we all work for the same boss - but alas, past efforts to do so haven't born fruit; the exercise being likened to herding cats!

Although most people would agree that Tasmania is a particularly beautiful part of the Australia rightly boasting of its clean air, clear skies, wonderful forests and wilderness, some of those who live on the larger island of Australia have a tendency to talk down Tasmanians in terms of their intellectual capacity and artistic creativity. They are wrong to do so. As I said to a meeting of the Australasian College of Phlebology recently, Hobart now has a well-established critical mass of scientists. Many scientists in diverse disciplines work and do their research here and many more visit from time to time for conferences and collegial collaborations. There is considerable work done in Hobart in the field of climate change and rising sea temperatures at the CSIRO, the Australian

---

<sup>1</sup> 30/04/2013 2:19:15 PM

Antarctic Division (the National Head Quarters of which are located at the edge of the city) and the University's Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies. The Antarctic Climate and Eco-systems Co-operative Research Centre is established in Hobart as is Secretariat of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. The latter annually hosts hundreds of visitors from all over the world who travel here to attend to attend meetings. The Menzies Research Institute Tasmania, which employs close to 400 people is just finishing massive extensions to its medical research facilities in Hobart and attracts many well-known international researchers. And of course, we must not forget the University of Tasmania, with its enrolment approaching 30,000 - about 6% of the island's population - and whose campuses are spread across the State. So, although Tasmania rightly has a reputation for beautiful scenery, clear air and good food it is also a place where academic endeavour is recognised, encouraged and prospers. Your presence here for these meetings helps to acknowledge this.

So things are pretty good at the tertiary level - so long as we don't mention the "G word," - but Tasmania has to face up to that staggering statistic that 49% of Tasmanians aged between 15 and 74 years are functionally illiterate. The Australian Bureau of Statistics tells us that "approximately 174,000 people in this State do not have the basic skills needed to understand and use information from newspapers, magazines, books and brochures and that overall, Tasmania has the lowest level of adult literacy skills in the nation.<sup>2</sup> Worse, the same data tells us there has been no improvement in adult literacy levels since they

---

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008. Adult Literacy and Life Skills Programme, Summary Results 2006. Cat No. 4228.0

were last measured in 1996. We need to face up to this appalling fact and deal with it. I suspect that it is a complex problem and not one that can be solved simply by the provision of more money. There is a real need to alter society's cultural values so that education at the primary and secondary level is properly valued and appreciated. The status of teachers needs to be improved so that they are regarded as equals to, if not better than AFL footballers and celebratory chefs. At the same time there is a need to improve teaching skills especially at the primary level and with respect, it seems to me that the Universities have a major part of play in the making of all these changes.

However, my function this morning is to welcome you to Government House for this joint meeting of Universities Australia and the University Chancellors' Council and not to harangue you about matters with which you are much more familiar than me.

Here at Government House we sincerely and warmly welcome each one of you and wish you all harmonious, stimulating and productive discussions.