

**ORDER OF AUSTRALIA ASSOCIATION NATIONAL CONFERENCE
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA,
BALL ROOM, GOVERNMENT HOUSE, THURSDAY 11 APRIL 2019**

Good evening and welcome to this reception for delegates attending the 2019 Order of Australia Association National Conference.

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.

May I acknowledge among you:

- Mr Philip Flood, National President of The Order of Australia Association and Mrs Carole Flood;
- Major General Barry Nunn, National Chairman of The Order of Australia Association and Mrs Margaret Nunn;
- Mr Alastair Douglas, Tasmanian State Chairmen and Chairman of the Conference Organising Committee and Mrs Jenny Douglas;
- Members and partners of the National Board;
- Members and Partners of the Conference Organising Committee.

I understand that this is the fourth OAA National Conference to be held in Tasmania and we are very pleased to have you here once again.

Tasmanian Governors have been associated with the Order through patronage for many years now and this Ball Room hosts Australia Day and Queen's Birthday Investitures each year. I am always proud to be able to invest those who make outstanding contributions to the Tasmanian community.

Some of you may be aware that I am currently undergoing treatment for Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma and this has restricted my ability to participate more fully in your Conference here – but I do take this opportunity to again thank Alastair Douglas and his committee for their invitations to me.

I thought I would tell you briefly about my interest in educational attainment in Tasmania. Education is of particular importance in Tasmania because it is one way in which we can help address the fact that on many measures Tasmania is the poorest Australian state.

Some of the reasons for the relative poverty of Tasmania we cannot do much about, such as the higher proportion of the population that is over 65, and the fact that high level labour productivity industries such as mining and finance are under-represented in Tasmania.

But there is something we can do to increase levels of employment, hours worked and productivity, because there are unambiguous linkages between these factors and education level. Education is a driver of economic prosperity for individuals and for the economy.

What is the education situation in Tasmania?

- The percentage of Tasmanian adults who are functionally illiterate is 4 percentage points higher than the national average;
- A smaller proportion of Tasmania's population has a bachelor's degree or higher than any other State or Territory;
- Year 10-12 direct retention rates at around 72% (for 2017)¹ are improving but remain at 12% below the national average.
- NAPLAN results are poorer, e.g. in 2018 proportionally fewer Grade 3 children above the minimum standard for reading, writing, spelling and grammar.

These issues are being addressed in various ways.

The Peter Underwood Centre is a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government in association with the Office of the Governor of Tasmania. Its focus is educational attainment and engagement and I am the Chair of its Advisory Committee.

The Children's University is an 'iconic project' of the Underwood Centre. It recognises the importance of learning outside the formal classroom setting and the importance of encouraging engagement in learning.

Schools in lower SES areas in Tasmania have joined the program which provides educational opportunities for 8-14-year-olds outside the school at a range of some 150 learning destinations including museums, sporting clubs and other organisations – even involving Children's University students in productions such as Rosehaven. Learning passports are stamped with hours of participation and students with a minimum of 30 hours are eligible to graduate.

¹ JR Rockliff, 'Tasmanian education is on the rise' 10 May 2018, http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/tasmanian_education_is_on_the_rise

Graduation ceremonies are held in conjunction with University December graduations, with children wearing gowns and participating in the Town and Gown Parades in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie.

In 2018 we had 343 graduating students from 31 schools across the state.

In addition to chairing the Advisory Committee, I spread the word about the Childrens University and have recruited a number of learning destinations.

The B4 Coalition

The name B4 represents the early years of a child's life from pregnancy (in utero) to age four, the years 'before' a child begins full-time school.

These early years are a time of rapid change and development for children as they learn and grow and discover the world around them. You may have heard about the 30-million-word gap study, the study by Betty Hart and Todd Risley that revealed that by age 4, children from lower SES groups hear 30 million words less than children from affluent homes with important consequences for early learning and brain development.

This study is somewhat controversial but it demonstrates the undoubted fact that there is a difference in the early learning opportunities of children from low-income families. And this persists. The B4 Coalition seeks to address this by ensuring that everybody values and supports the early years, by saturating, infiltrating our communities with the message that it is important to communicate with babies and children, to talk to them, play with them, sing to them, get out and about and explore their community with them and encourage them to connect with local early years services.

The B4 Early Years Coalition is based on the 'collective impact model' where organisations across diverse sectors work together to address social issues. It embraces the idea that everybody in the community: individuals, businesses and services have a role to play in ensuring the early years are valued. And it provides an Early Years Toolkit which offers ideas about how we all do this.

I see it as part of my role to spread the word in the community about the work of the B4 Early Years Coalition.

Adult Literacy and 26 Ten

How do we tackle the fact that 48% of Tasmanians are functionally illiterate? We need a range of measures. For adults the Government's 26Ten program is exemplary. This program has now been running for almost 8 years and I have had the opportunity to see their literacy tutors at work with adult learners and to visit a workplace and speak to employees who have benefited from the program by improving their numeracy skills, literacy and communication. 26Ten has 860 organisations and individual supporters and 1,333 people have volunteered and undertaken training to be a literacy tutor.ⁱ

When we travel around the state visiting workplaces and industries, one of the questions we now ask is, 'Do you have a literacy or numeracy problem with your employees?'. And we explain how 26Ten can help.

Early this year I launched a new 26Ten program, the 26Ten Chat resource which encourages and empowers people to refer adults to literacy and numeracy support. This resource is necessary because of the sensitivity of the issue and difficulty of raising it with a person suspected of struggling with literacy or numeracy. It suggests ways of starting the conversation and following up with the person using five steps.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a most pleasant, informative and rewarding Conference and social stay in our lovely Island State.

Thank you.

ⁱ See their website at <https://26ten.tas.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>