

Towards a prosperous yet sustainable Australia — What now for the Lucky Country?

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Abstract

This is the opening address given by His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Ret'd), Governor of New South Wales, to the *Royal Society of New South Wales and Four Academies Forum* on *Towards a prosperous yet sustainable Australia — What now for the Lucky Country?* on Thursday, 29th November 2019.

Let me begin with an Acknowledgement of Country. I acknowledge and pay respect to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and to their Elders, past and present, who are the traditional owners of this beautiful part of our country here in Sydney on which we meet today and the custodians of knowledge and learning going back 60,000 years.

Thank you and, ladies and gentlemen, and, a very warm welcome to Government House Sydney this morning. I'm delighted to be here for our fourth Royal Society Forum with the four learned Academies and to continue, I hope, in the quality of rich discussion we've had over the last three years.

For those who have not been to a Royal Society Forum in the past, you may be wondering: Why are we here? When I became Governor four years ago, and I was considering the question: how does the Governor value-add to the community, to the people of New South Wales, I sat down and I developed my strategic plan, my thinking about the next five years, and the areas that seemed to me to be in need of some attention. The number of the areas I looked at included: rural and regional sustainability

and the development of rural and regional New South Wales; our youth development endeavours; many of the social issues that confront us at the present time; the mental health concerns we have in our community; and what's happening in our Indigenous communities. I sort of knitted those together, but I saw there were many cross connections. I think one of my strengths lies in identifying patterns and joining dots. During my time as Governor and as I've travelled around New South Wales communities, I could see many great endeavours, but many disconnections.

Having served in the military for 42 years, despite what you read about the Army, Navy and Airforce not liking each other, that is incorrect. We do like each other in a way but I also know that you produce your most effective combat capability out of a joint force. It must integrate; it must collaborate; it must coordinate. And I kept seeing the same need writ large across so many areas of activity in our community. And I thought: am I able to take a this a step further? And can I help develop useful ideas to assist in making progress on these issues? I looked at a number of my roles and patronages,

including Patron of the Royal Society and I'm the University Visitor across the state. Of course, not now in the old sense — the concept of Visitor has moved on — but I take a real interest in what's happening in our tertiary institutions across the State. And I thought: is there some way of bringing the Royal Society and the universities together to look at some of these issues in a non-political space, in a place where we can talk about big issues facing Australia without having to worry about being on the front page tomorrow? Can we talk about collaboration, integration, coordination? Can we bring these great minds in our country together to talk about a particular issue from different perspectives?

And, as luck would have it, as Patron of the Royal Society I met with Don Hector for the first time. He was re-building, working on building the Royal Society, I was looking for a vehicle, and at that meeting we decided on this forum. We agreed that the Royal Society would determine the topic, I would provide the location and the next step was to ask the Academies to contribute, which thankfully they did. And for those representing the Academies today, thank you for doing that and thank you for keeping to your commitment and allowing us this opportunity to speak, as I say, in a way in which we can bring together different perspectives on the same problem. And, relevant to today's topic, perhaps come up with an understandable definition of "sustainability" that we could all walk away with and share. We were just talking about that before we came in. If you throw that word out there, you will get many different responses as to what it means to people. And so that will be an interesting discussion as we run through that our program today.

Where are we going in the future? We'll hear many responses to that question today but I was talking to Catherine Livingstone in her Chancellor of UTS role yesterday afternoon and she pointed out that in 2030, the HECS bill, the tertiary education debt, in our country will be \$230 billion which, at that time, it will have a material impact on the national economy, and our budget, to the degree that it could threaten our triple A credit status. We might be educating a large number of people but we haven't paid the bill yet, and I see that theme running through some of the presentations today.

We see that 40% of students, in a recent survey at our universities, do not support democracy as a form of government that we should continue with into the future and perhaps, therefore, if we draw a link, nor do they support the economic principles, philosophies, that underlie democracies. So where is the next generation thinking we should be heading?. Today, I hope, we will receive some food for thought about different options, alternatives and, themes, lines we should work further on, and about how to present those ideas to our decision-makers in a way that engages them and enables them to make decisions rather than pushes them into corners, which is often the way things play out today.

While we're looking at the topics today, and as you run through them — as would be the way when you're looking at how to we solve a problem, you look at problems and ask questions about possibilities, this is a particular issue, how do we tackle it? — please remember in the back of your mind that, at least from my observation of the last four years, our society is very rich: rich in a non-material sense. There is enormous commitment to community, there is enor-

mous commitment to each other, and there is — Hugh might say a few things about this today — this enormous richness in our communities. Travel through the drought-stricken communities of New South Wales at the present time. They're a bit down. But they are enormously resilient. They look out for each other; they create opportunities; they re-invent their communities. Go through rural New South Wales ... everything from the Elvis Presley Festival to the Deni Ute Muster, they're still running events to bring communities together.

This is not a “wringing of the hands” exercise about where we are in Australia today; the Forum is about how do we use that enormous love for country, energy and desire to help each other, and channel it into a positive force for the future of our country.

I think that's there's a tremendous opportunity out there, let's use it. So no more from

me; let's hear it from the people who know what they're talking about on the subject. And I'll declare the fourth Royal Society of New South Wales and Four Academies Forum open: let's look at this question of how we move towards a prosperous yet sustainable Australia — what now for our “Lucky Country”? — and really look forward to the day.

One note of apology, which I was taught I should never do in an opening speech, I will leave at some time today to go and visit one of the SES headquarters following yesterday's downpour and the death of one of their members but I'll be back my late afternoon so if I disappear for a while it's simply to do that duty, not because I've seen who's up next. But thank you all. It is my pleasure to now declare the fourth Royal Society of New South Wales and Four Academies Forum open.

