

Bicentennial celebrations The Admiralty House vice-regal reception

His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd)

Susan M Pond AM FRSN FTSE FAHMS (President, RSNW)

Her Excellency, Mrs Linda Hurley

Originally scheduled to be part of our celebrations in 2021, this reception was delayed not only by the pandemic but also by competing demands during 2022 on their Excellencies' time. These included but were not limited to the Platinum Jubilee celebrations of Elizabeth II's accession, the ongoing torrential flooding throughout the year in the Eastern States, the Australian Federal Election, and the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Their Excellencies, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (rtd), and Her Excellency Mrs Linda Hurley graciously made time available for a small reception for 35 people at Admiralty House, Kirribilli, on 7 November 2022.

The Honourable David Hurley

Good evening, all. Linda and I are delighted to welcome you to Admiralty House for what is a celebratory occasion: the 200th anniversary of the Royal Society of New South Wales. I temper my excitement for your celebration ever so slightly, because two months ago we lost our Queen. It was Her Majesty's great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, who granted Royal Assent to the Society in 1866. So, in celebrating the Society's bicentenary, we also reflect on Queen Elizabeth II's lifetime of service.

As this audience knows, Linda's and my association with the Society goes back many years to my Governor of New South Wales days. As a former Patron of the Society, I thoroughly enjoyed the many occasions in which we gathered to consider some of the big issues of the day. One of those occasions was nearly four years ago to the day, in a speech I delivered to the 2018 Royal Society of New South Wales and Four Learned Academies Forum entitled, "Towards a

prosperous yet sustainable Australia — what now for the Lucky Country?" Here is an excerpt from that speech: "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."¹

I have been reflecting on those comments, particularly given that many of those same communities have recently been impacted by flooding. What comes to mind? That our response to current challenges — that ability to stare adversity down — has not diminished one iota in the ensuing three years. How do I know that? Because of the many visits Linda and I have made to disaster-affected communities and the people we've met, including today in Moree.

We are, at our core, a good and strong people. We see it in our response to the floods. We saw it our response to the 2019–20 fires and other natural disasters.

¹ See <https://royalsoc.org.au/images/pdf/journal/152-1-Hurley.pdf>

Communities on their knees, but not out. People who are resourceful, gritty, innovative, determined, supportive and compassionate — a “richness of spirit” is how I like to describe those characteristics all wrapped up. Those characteristics are not confined to communities impacted by natural disasters. They are on show in myriad ways around our country every day of the year. Good people, good organisations — improving the lives of those around them. I include the Royal Society of New South Wales in that special group.

The Society and other members of that special group epitomise the characteristics of our late Queen. History will remember few like Queen Elizabeth II. We have witnessed — and benefited from — her remarkable life. Noting all that changed during the Queen’s 70-year reign and all that will change in Australia in the next 70 years, there is a timeless quality that we can draw from Her Majesty. For what did not change were the values and characteristics that Her Majesty lived by from the moment she acceded to the throne as a young adult, becoming monarch with scant preparation but with a deep reservoir of strength and faith. They were a constant. Her dutiful service wasn’t an act; it was who she was.

Throughout her reign, she consistently demonstrated tireless and selfless service, devotion to duty and a compassion for others. Her Majesty epitomised servant leadership and, particularly in this age of extreme individualism, set an example of living and serving for something greater than herself. That is her enduring gift to us all. Again, it is a delight for Linda and me to share in your bicentenary celebrations. It’s impressive — 200 years is a remarkable achievement and a credit to all members

of the Society, past and present. We look forward to spending some time with you and celebrating.

The President’s response

Thank you, Your Excellency, for your uplifting remarks. I extend my own welcome to Fellows, Members and Friends of the Society. We stand here in this beautiful spot in Kirribilli, thanks to their Excellencies, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia and Mrs Linda Hurley. As you have just heard, they know the Society well. I mentioned this beautiful spot, Kirribilli, because it is also where I am proud to reside. It is named after the First People’s name *kiarabilli*, which means “good fishing spot.” It remains so today. We acknowledge the traditional first peoples of this land. They are the Cammeraygal people of the Eora Nation. We pay our respect to their leaders — past, present, and emerging.

Emerging is an important word tonight, in the context of this welcome to country and emerging leaders and for the Royal Society of New South Wales. As His Excellency noted, the Society is completing its two-hundred-year milestone celebrations. Notable amongst these celebrations have been the Society’s exhibition, NEXUS, which was on display in the State Library of NSW from November 2021 to June 2022, the Garden Party hosted by our current Patron, Her Excellency, the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC at Government House in March this year, our Gala Dinner in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney on 24 June 2022, and of course, tonight’s reception.

Perhaps we could say that one silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic cloud is that we were forced to delay the celebrations

planned for 2021 and then stagger them over many months once public health restrictions were lifted. The additional months gave the Society time to review and deepen its understanding of its 200-year-old heritage, archives, and its impact, and bring them to light in various publications and forums, and, more importantly, in people's minds. We are all the richer for that, especially because of the opportunity to acknowledge that we cannot change history, but we can ensure that we are not perpetuating legacies that these days we find to be abhorrent.

This reception was planned originally to be part of our bicentennial celebrations in May 2021. Another silver lining of the pandemic is that this delayed reception affords us the opportunity to inaugurate the Society's third century. As you read in your invitation to attend tonight, the Society looks forward during the next century to shaping and delivering Australia's future, the future that we all want. And what is that future?

The past two and a half years have been extraordinary. The unnerving combination of a global pandemic compounded by energy scarcity, rapid inflation, and geopolitical tensions boiling over leave us wondering what certainties are left. But even with so many uncertainties, there are good reasons to believe that the future can be bright. It must be bright. We must make it so. Many issues can, at least in part, be addressed with current technologies if we are able to prioritise and deploy them systematically and focus our efforts. We saw this play out in the eye of the global hurricane presented to

us by the pandemic. It forced us to prioritise and accelerate quick wins in healthcare, to name but one of many sectors.

The pandemic sparked so many innovations. I mention only a few — telehealth, virtual hospitals, drones delivering medical supplies, cloud-based monitoring of home ventilation devices, McMonty personal ventilation hoods,² and, of course, invention and deployment of rapid diagnostic tests and delivery of new vaccines in record time. But delivering the future we all want requires more than technology.

The future we want will not happen without intelligent, concerted effort, without fostering knowledge and creativity as important drivers of social and economic wellbeing, without bringing the sciences and humanities together to set the course through the many unresolved questions and steer toward better outcomes. These are the ambitions of the Royal Society of New South Wales as it seeks to improve the lives of many. These are the ambitions embodied in the Society's ideals: commitment to advancing the best interests of society; a questioning spirit; diverse and inclusive engagement; boldness and innovation; and good governance. None of these ambitions will be achieved without the work of the Society's volunteer Council and Committees, the input and contributions by all its members, and generous support by sponsors and donors. I thank you all for being here tonight. I look forward to your continued engagement with the Royal Society of New South Wales and with its ambitions as it enters its third century.

² See <https://innovationaccelerationprogram.com.au/case-studies/mcmonty-hood/>

Her Excellency, Mrs Linda Hurley

Well known for wanting the world to sing,
Her Excellency performed the song she
wrote for the Society, then led guests in
singing the chorus of “You are my Sunshine”
three times to ensure that everyone joined
in.

Royal Society of NSW founded in Sydney

1821

*Philosophical Society Australasia how it
began*

*Science, Art, Literature, Philosophy,
knowledge*

*Advanced Studies, Investigations member-
ship you see*

*The first Scientific Society in British Colony
NSW*

*A special group of influential men like
minded had their say*

*Sir Thomas Brisbane Governor the first
President*

*Royal Society of NSW Queen Victoria
granted Royal Assent*

*The Society has done much work to foster
local Research*

*Science, Meetings, Symposia, Publications,
Fabulous work*

*The Society encourages studies in Philosophy
Literature Art*

*Awarding prizes and medals achievements
in research a part*

*Liaison with similar bodies maintain a
library too*

*Open to all people their aim to bring
knowledge out to you*

*Committed to advancing the best interests
of Society*

*A questioning spirit boldness and innovation
you can see.*

