

ADDRESS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA**  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
**CIVIC RECEPTION**  
BROKEN HILL REGIONAL ART GALLERY  
7 OCTOBER 2008

I acknowledge the traditional keepers of the land on which we gather, their rich heritage and offering, and the efforts of those who have followed, in valuing and preserving their footprint.

My friends, thank you for welcoming Michael and me so warmly this evening - in this special place, at the heart of your community:

. Its doors officially opened 104 years ago by my predecessor Lord Northcote, and reopened here, on its centenary, at this superbly restored historic building, Sully's Emporium;

. And this very month, the host of three marvellous new exhibitions celebrating 125 years of Broken Hill's mining and social history:

. its characters and daily life, its luminous and startling landscapes;

. the unique perspectives of its dwellers and observers;

. the ample space you allow for stories to be told, for journeys to unfold.

Arriving in Broken Hill this morning was the second stop along a new journey for me, into our Murray-Darling Basin:

. the Basin is an expanse I don't know well;

. and yet I have a sense of its towns, colours, and meaning in Australian life that has been with me since I was a little girl growing up in central western Queensland.

The extraordinary story we learned of "the hill that changed the nation":

. *a hill*, wrote Geoffrey Blainey, *so rich that it inspired, in all probability, more wishful thinking than any hill in Australia*;

. the boundless, desolate plains - huge sheep stations - isolated and thirsty;

. the brilliant red of the Sturt Desert Pea that smears the dirt awash with rain;

. the jet black iron cap, the line of lode, the immeasurable seam of mineral wealth;

. the mysterious boundary rider, Charles Rasp, fluent in five languages, highly educated - known as the "walking encyclopaedia" - who first pegged out his claim on the top of the hill and, within 18 months, had floated the Broken Hill Proprietary Company;

. the birth of BHP, the Big Mine, the Silver Mile, and the Silver City;

- . the cycles of heartbreak and hope, devastation and rebirth that have followed;
- . the timeless colours of the outback that your junior poet laureate, Ellysia Oldsen, speaks so beautifully of;
- . atop Pro Hart's coffin, the Australian flag, with his miner's helmet and lamp - a tribute to the years he spent working in the mines;
- . his larrikin, provincial, provocative spirit; his deftness and sheer talent; his passionate activism - so iconic, so Australian.

Precious memories, my friends, and yet I've scarcely tapped the lode.

I nevertheless carry them with me, as I do all that I have previously gathered from my Australian life, into this new role:

- . that spans our nation;
- . that demands of me deeper and broader insights;
- . a keener engagement with all issues, which, by virtue of their vast and diverse territory of origin, are complex and testing.

I come, therefore, to this town, this district and region, to seek to understand:

- . the issues that are central to your identity, your livelihood and future;
- . your contribution to our country's social, cultural and economic fabric;
- . the contemporary challenges of life here;
- . the impact of changing economies and natural environments, locally and globally;
- . your responses, your concerns, your vision.

It is a tough undertaking to serve and support the community we love.

Community is a word that is used often; but more often to lament what we fear is slipping away from us.

The ingredients of modern life are producing a mix that in many ways defies our shared existence:

- . individualism;
- . people distanced by income, age, education, language, ethnicity, and loss;
- . frenetic schedules at work and at home;
- . rare spaces to talk quietly and reflect.

And yet we have begun to talk more:

- . of place and being;
- . of our connectedness with one another;
- . our shared passage and belonging.

Local councils, enterprises and cooperatives, individuals, in their public and private roles, are taking the lead in community building and rebuilding; engaging us; helping us to retrieve that collective sense, to resume it into our daily lives.

The uncertainty we feel at the workings:

- . of volatile financial markets worldwide;
- . of fire, flood, drought and acid mud on the Murray-Darling Basin;
- . and of our own actions over decades,

tells us of our need for unity and leadership.

Through widespread upheaval, we see too how communities take shape and evolve; of how ideas can divide, galvanise, and ultimately mobilise people.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's a poem I'm fond of, by an American writer, Marge Piercy, called *To be of Use*. A part of it goes like this:

*I love the people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,  
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience...  
to move things forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again...  
...the people who submerge in the task and move in a common rhythm...*

My friends, I am honoured and grateful to be in the company of those people this evening.

Thank you for having us, Broken Hill.