

ADDRESS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA**  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
**CIVIC RECEPTION**  
ALBURY LIBRARY MUSEUM, ALBURY  
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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 gorgeous and special place, at the heart of your community.

I know how attached to it you must feel.

When Queensland got its new State Library a couple of years ago, Queenslanders came out in droves, and they haven't stopped.

The architect talked about libraries as one of our most public institutions: a place where people can gather as citizens, rather than as customers; an open space, to dip in and out of as we please.

I would go there often. I loved it:

- . cradling fragile manuscripts with white-gloved hands;
- . poring over photographs of lost lives seeping through ageing cracks;
- . being spellbound by indigenous dreaming and dance;
- . and, perhaps best of all, watching the march of prams and parents, whose trails warm every pathway there.

These things help us to see and cherish the fabric and workings of daily life; our heritage and the diverse influences that have shaped it; our natural environment, and the unique perspectives of its dwellers and observers.

The things you've captured here so beautifully and thoughtfully, leaving ample room for stories to be told, and journeys to unfold.

I've been on quite a journey myself recently.

Bourke, Prattenville, Menindee, the Barrier Ranges, Broken Hill, Mildura, Nangiloc, Red Cliffs, Wentworth, Goolwa and the Lower Lakes.

Towns and districts, two weeks ago, I didn't know well, but soon enough they felt like old friends. We had plenty to catch up on.

At every stop along our travels through the northern and western regions of the Murray Darling Basin, Michael and I were welcomed with such generosity and affection.

Women and men, young people, families, elders and leaders, paused in the midst of their troubled times to open their arms to us and lead us into their lives and communities.

How privileged and humbled we were to pull up a chair at the table, share a blanket on the riverbank, get sand in our shoes, even have a few laughs, with these people whose livelihoods and spirits have been almost eviscerated by the workings of natural and human action over many decades.

And so today we begin the second leg of our Murray-Darling expedition - into its more southern parts. And from here: to Shepparton, Echuca, Deniliquin, Blighty and their surrounds.

Another precious opportunity for me to learn about your indigenous, white settler and migrant histories, your economic roots, your urban growth, and your place in a vital rural network.

Information so important to me in my new role:

- . one that spans our nation;
- . that demands of me deeper and broader insights;
- . and 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 and hopes.

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, I am honoured and grateful to have witnessed this capacity in you.

Thank you for having us, Albury.