

AUSTRALIA DAY WA – AUSTRALIA DAY 2017 LAUNCH

**ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE KERRY SANDERSON AC
GOVERNOR OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

THURSDAY, 19 JANUARY 2017

Thank you to Reverend Sealin Garlett for your Welcome to Country.

I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Noongar people - and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I am pleased to join you this evening to launch Australia Day celebrations in the beautiful and historic grounds of Government House. I am also pleased to congratulate the Australia Day Council of Western Australia on its organisation of tonight's event and on the fact that Australia Day WA, as it is now known, is celebrating 40 years, since its inception.

After the climax of the 1988 Bicentennial, not many of us expected that the Australian public would continue to observe Australia Day in such style and with such enthusiasm. In fact it wasn't until 1994 that we all began to celebrate Australia Day consistently as a public holiday on the actual date. However each year since 1988 Australia Day celebrations across the country have continued to grow in popularity.

Pleasingly the majority of official events also include conducting Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Land ceremonies.

While we cannot be proud of our history in the treatment of aboriginal people, or indeed of some migrants, Australia Day is a Day where we can come together in harmony to recognize our nation and the wonderful place Australia is, and be pleased that 98 per cent of Australians say they are proud to be Australian and proud of the values that characterise Australia.

Australia Day is a chance to celebrate 'us': what makes our nation special and unique, and call to mind those things that we can be thankful for. We are a country strengthened by diversity of cultures and languages, blessed with plentiful natural resources, and fortified by the many and varied achievements of our people.

Australians also share a love of our precious natural environment and many enjoy the outdoors lifestyle. Our wide open spaces, clear blue skies, and unique flora and fauna have inspired many artists and writers throughout the years.

As a number of you would be aware I was pleased to launch the WA Parks Foundation last October, with a Vision that 'Our Parks (meaning national parks and conservation reserves) are increasingly loved and visited and the plants, animals, landscapes and cultural values they embody are protected and a source of pride for all Western Australians. Aboriginal Australians have set an example for us in their connection to country, and more of our community generally are recognising the importance of the country to their own identity and health.

Dorothea MacKellar had this sense of pride and love when she wrote her famous poem, *My Country*. She was only 19 years old at the time, and desperately homesick in the United Kingdom. I would like to quote one verse:

*I love a sunburnt country
A land of sweeping plains
Of ragged mountain ranges
Of droughts and flooding rains
I love her far horizons
I love her jewel-sea
Her beauty and her terror
The wide brown land for me!*

Our continued success as a nation is dependent on a shared commitment to our country and to values such as inclusiveness, kindness and mateship, innovation and creativity, determination, resilience and courage. These values draw us together as a community.

In the lead up to Australia Day, we take the chance to recognise fellow Australians who we might admire because of what they have achieved and how their work has helped others.

Our four 2017 Australians of the Year for Western Australia have, just like the other finalists and those who have gone before them, each made the conscious choice to help their community, to lend a helping hand to those in need, and to work with others to develop innovative solutions to challenges that test our communities. And our State is all the richer for it.

Your generosity of spirit is inspirational. Your actions, values, and commitment instil a great sense of pride, and hopefulness, for our future. For all of this, and more, we sincerely thank you.

This evening, I would like to acknowledge WA Australian of the Year, businessman Andrew Forrest, who is well known and recognised for his generosity and philanthropy and for his community leadership, including his role as an anti-slavery advocate.

Congratulations again to Andrew Forrest, and also to Senior Australian of the Year for WA Peter Kenyon, to WA Young Australian of the Year, Abdullahi Alim, and to WA Local Hero, June Oscar AO.

The four category recipients will be welcomed by the Chair of the National Australia Day Council, Western Australian born Ben Roberts Smith VC, and the national winners are to be announced by the Prime Minister on the eve of Australia Day on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra. I hope that the WA winners have a safe and enjoyable journey to Canberra, and good luck. Our best wishes go with you.

I would also like to pay tribute to previous WA Australian of the Year recipients for Western Australia who are here tonight and particularly mention the Honourable Malcolm McCusker AC CVO QC, our 2011 recipient and notably the first WA Governor to be the reigning WA Australian of the Year; Professor Ralph Martins the 2010 WA Australian of the Year for his world leading Alzheimer's disease research in the 50th anniversary year of the awards.

Last but not least the 2015 recipient Professor Lyn Beazley AO. Lyn continues to work tirelessly not only to promote the importance of the scientific research undertaken in Western Australia but also for many other organisations which help others, including Fairbridge which helps aboriginal prisoners and the innovative Autism

Academy for Software Quality Assurance. I congratulate her on her ongoing contributions to our community.

One of the things I particularly enjoy about my role is meeting people who do wonderful things, either because they achieve a lot as individuals or because they help others who are less fortunate than themselves. I, and many of you I am sure, believe that we live in the best country in the world, and that is partly due to its climate and natural resources but also to its people. Thank you to all of you here tonight for the part you play in making our country great.

In closing, I congratulate the Australia Day Council on their work to make us all aware of the importance of our celebration of our national day, and of those who work to make our nation better. I also wish everyone here this evening an enjoyable, safe and relaxing Australia Day ahead - may it be a day of reflection, thankfulness, and celebration.