

Australia Day Speech Cr Chris Meddows-Taylor, Mayor Central Goldfields Shire

26 January, 2008 Bealiba

It is a great pleasure to be invited to present the Australia Day speech in this wonderful and historic town of Bealiba. As someone who has chosen to live, work and contribute within another small town within our Shire this invitation which you have generously given to me is of special significance.

When I was a boy I must admit to being a bit confused about Australia Day. What was it that was actually being commemorated? Was it the landing of the First Fleet on 26th January 1788? Was it the coming together of the various States to form the Commonwealth of Australia? Was it about being Australian and what that means – our link with the Anzac tradition? Was it a combination of all these things? Or was it something else?

Perhaps it is only more recently as I look around our troubled world that so many things we take for granted in our country and community look very good indeed. There is also so much hope and optimism for the future. For many peoples around the world this is impossible.

The world indeed is a troubled place. We have seen the difficulty in bringing peace in Ireland and the former Yugoslavia. The problems in the Middle East and Afghanistan continue. We struggle to see the solution for Iraq. More recently the shocking death of Benazir Bhutto showed the immense issues Pakistan faces as it struggles towards democracy.

The world economy is also facing very uncertain times. The stock market is extremely volatile. The effect of the Sub-Prime lending in the US continues to send negative shockwaves in many countries. The US economy itself –so long a point of stability and growth –is now facing possible or even probable recession.

The environmental situation is of course no better. Although scientists still disagree on detail and timing, most accept the devastating message of global warming. The deeply worrying message is that even with prompt action, undoing past damage will take much time? Can some damage be undone?

Overall, what we have in Australia therefore seems so good. Indeed we have much to celebrate. We live in a country where we are free to express our political views and feelings on key issues. We know broadly what we mean by "liberty" and we know we have a good measure of it. It is something which we value a great deal. We can be ourselves and express ourselves in our own way. There is at least a large measure of equality of opportunity. The poor kid and grow up to be Prime Minister.

Our economy is essentially robust and has driven several years of high returns driven by an insatiable demand by China for our raw materials and resources. Unemployment is at record low levels.

The impact of drought on our environment has been devastating but there are hopes that the return of rains in some areas associated with the La Nina weather event may indeed mark the return to more regular rainfall and the easing of water restrictions.

There are so many other things to celebrate –the open space we live in; the beauty of our natural environment; the pride in our heritage town settings; the caring communities we enjoy in the country; looking out for each other in times of need; good schools for our children to go to and a range of community and recreation facilities and services to support our lives. The list goes on of what we enjoy and possibly even take for granted.

Truly there is much to celebrate on Australia Day. We have a proud history and many good things in our lives compared to many in this world. We also have hope for the future and for our children's future.

Australia Day is a time to celebrate all the good things we enjoy which have been handed to us. How are we to leave things and hand them on to our children and future generations? What type of world do we want them to be living in and how will we prepare for it?

One of our great sayings passed on through the generation is “no worries mate”. Does “no worries mate” apply as we prepare for the future?

Before a recent federal election one journalist wrote that at this time there were major issues of world order, social unrest, economic uncertainty and environmental damage. He added “not that Australians have ever been too worried about these issues”. What a put down! But if we are honest, is not this comment deserved?

We face many challenges ahead. We recognise that the gap between rich and poor is growing, household debt is at alarming levels, the economic growth we have cannot last indefinitely and we are starting to see the impact of environmental damage and climate change. Suicide rates for males aged 15 to 25 have more than tripled over the past 40 years.

Within our own community we struggle with low household income; higher levels of unemployment, poor health, low educational retention and the particularly worrying awareness that in an overall prosperous Australian economy we have higher levels of people who go hungry.

Australia Day is indeed a time to celebrate so many good things which have come our way. It is also a time to take stock and realise that we can only expect to reap what we sow. Going forward we all need to think of how we contribute as citizens within our community and society. We can't say “no worries” and simply take what's on offer and put nothing back.

Earlier today I administered the Australian Citizenship ceremony to four of our residents who then made their pledges and we then welcomed as new Australian citizens. Key words from that ceremony resonate “Australia gives all its people the chance to live and grow in liberty and to share in the common good. In return, we owe Australia our duty as good neighbours and good citizens.” Surely those of us who are already citizens owe our own duty as good neighbours and good citizens.?

Earlier today we also celebrated the Australia Day Awards. Greg Waters that tireless and always happy community worker who has battled health problems to create joy and happiness for so many was made Citizen of the Year. Two Highview students – Jonathon Payne and Caitlyn Egan with a very impressive record of community contribution which many twice their age would find daunting were made Young Citizens of the Year. Those who contribute so much on Christmas Day to ensure all members of our community have a fine Christmas Lunch were recognized. The Christmas Community Lunch received the Outstanding Community Contribution Award.

These are people who have made such a positive difference in our community. These people -young and older- have realised through their efforts, that commitment and hard work in our community will build a better community. Through their contribution they enhance the very features of Australian life we celebrate today.

Australia Day is a day to celebrate and on behalf of my Council colleagues I wish all members of our fine community a wonderful celebration. It is also a time to be inspired by those who have received awards today. There are also so many who contribute to community life who it has not been possible to recognise. It is a time for pride in our past, for giving thanks for the present and for a sense of optimism for the future.

It is also a time for us to ask ourselves how will we make a difference for the better and for our commitment and resolve to ensure we do just that.