AUSTRALIAN METEOROLOGICAL AND OCEANOGRAPHIC SOCIETY 30TH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM

Thursday 22 August, 2017

Ms Mary Voice, President of the Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society

Mr David Grimes, President of the World Meteorological Organisation

Professor Ellie Highwood, President of the Royal Meteorological Society

Dr David Carlson, Chair of the World Climate Research Programme

Professor Brian Golding OBE, Chair of the World Meteorological Organisation HIWeather Programme

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this morning. A poignant acknowledgment when you ponder the millennia of changed and changing weather patterns through which our indigenous people have cared for this land.

I am delighted to be with you at this special symposium to mark the 30th anniversary of the founding of AMOS – and the 45th anniversary of its earlier incarnation as a branch of the Royal Meteorological Society.

May I say that, as Governor of Victoria, and a devoted supporter of this State's outstanding research and education sectors, I am proud to note that AMOS is, like the Bureau of Meteorology, headquartered in Melbourne.

Proud – though not surprised. Perhaps the choice of location was related to the fact that our wonderfully variable weather gives meteorological instruments plenty to be going on with.

I note that your distinguished guest, Professor Brian Golding, found the idea of our weather so irresistible he chose to spend a couple of years here with the Bureau in the early 1990s.

I am very honoured to welcome him back and to have this opportunity to welcome so many outstanding scientists and professionals dedicated to the study of weather, oceans, water and climate.

But I am particularly pleased to know that AMOS is both a rigorous scientific organisation, and a broad and welcoming church, open not only to experts but also 'weather enthusiasts': retired scientists, teachers, students or simply rain gauge devotees.

There is no doubt that the weather in its broadest sense – taking in oceanography, atmospheric science and the ancient weather cycles we are learning to read in ice core samples – is becoming more interesting to more people than ever before.

When this Society's forerunner was established 45 years ago, the phrase 'How's this weather then?' was a mere conversation starter. Now that harmless phrase has taken on a more serious overtone.

It has become clear in recent decades that everyone has a stake in the science you are here to discuss.

I see that the programme for this event reflects a growing interest in extreme weather, for instance, including heatwaves and floods, as well as ocean forecasting, and advances in our ability to model sea-level change.

Tomorrow, another of your eminent international guests, Dr David Carlson, will discuss the extraordinarily rich data now available, around the impact of rising levels of CO2 in the atmosphere, and the challenge of translating information into knowledge we can use in our daily lives.

Every summer, as we challenge our energy supplies to feed power-hungry air conditioners, or fear that a stretch of very hot days might mean terrible bushfires, the connectedness of climate and the way we humans live on this planet only becomes more apparent.

That's why I find the concept of 'climate citizen science' so appealing.

It gives ordinary people a chance to inform themselves. It gives people a chance to be part of a worldwide effort to develop an ever-more accurate picture of the weather ahead.

We know that STEM education in schools and universities is vital to innovation and future prosperity - in Victoria, as everywhere else.

But I have no doubt that we all need some STEM skills in everyday life as well.

Yesterday's climate citizen workshop seems a wonderfully hands-on way of providing ordinary people with weather-related STEM skills, including the ability to separate solid data from the merely anecdotal.

We know that crowd-sourced local observations – of bird migration patterns, or plant flowering, or reports from recreational divers – can make a powerful contribution to a global effort to better understand our climate.

And so can insights from neighbouring fields of expertise. Collaboration between disciplines is key if we are to grapple with the task of mitigating the impacts of changing weather.
Already, scientists are discovering fascinating links between micro-climates and the global-scale weather trends; links between the weather and health; and links between weather and social and economic impacts.

Often it is cross-disciplinary work that makes these discoveries possible. What we learn from research into paleo-climates or ocean currents or agricultural science can feed into an ever-richer and more nuanced understanding of today's weather and tomorrow's climate.

But if we are to make the most of our vastly improved forecasting capacity, meteorologists will perhaps need to join forces with experts in areas even further afield, not least in the behavioural sciences and communication.

It is only in that way that we can be assured that the public will be well educated for the complex climate debates that are so important to our future.

I commend AMOS for the work it continues to do in this area, through its quarterly bulletin (BAMOS), regional workshops and even its weather-tipping competition.

I note, in particular, that a great deal of effort goes into helping younger scientists develop their communication skills at workshops and special 'boot camps' run at AMOS's annual National Conferences.

It is encouraging to know that those young researchers will continue the work of this Society, and that they shall drive the next 30 or 45 years of scientific inquiry, collegial discussion and public education.

I congratulate you on the anniversary of AMOS's founding, and wish you all a rewarding and, I trust, rain-free symposium.

It is a pleasure for me to declare this Symposium officially open.