



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

**MELBOURNE FORUM 10TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT State Library of
Victoria
Tuesday 26th November 2019**

Professor Emeritus Andrea Hull AO, Chair and **Board Members**, Melbourne Forum

Distinguished guests

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 evening.

Tony and I are delighted to be here tonight in celebration of Melbourne Forum's Anniversary.

I remember well when it started. Thankfully, this evening I am saying that about an organisation celebrating its 10th anniversary. I notice that, increasingly, I am equally able to say it about those marking 30 or 40 years, or even those celebrating their half centuries!

In this instance though, of course I can clearly recall the genesis and the early days of Melbourne Forum. I know well its intent of openness to all, and its commitment to exploring issues pertinent to Melbourne life through conversation.

Holding to that founding principle, I thought that a good use of my 10 minutes or so this evening would be for me to share with you a few summary thoughts of Melbourne and Victoria from my perspective.

It is a truly privileged perspective, in that the Governor's role carries the privilege of interaction with a vast range of people from across the State, and a wide-angle view of industry and community here.

So, let me start by emphasising the rapid growth that we are currently experiencing in Victoria.

Population-wise, we are growing faster than other part of the country. It is projected that Melbourne will shortly be Australia's biggest city.

Our economy, after 25 years of year on year growth, is now experiencing higher growth than elsewhere in the nation. So too the rate of jobs. We have experienced the nation's strongest growth in jobs since 2014, so that last year, nearly one quarter of new jobs in Australia were created in Victoria.

We all know that, in Victoria, we are in the midst of what might be the biggest infrastructure program in our history. It inevitably presents its challenges in terms of movement around our city, but is important for our liveability and productivity.

In this rapidly growing environment, we know that we profit from the **diversity** of our people. Almost half of us were born overseas or have one parent born overseas, and we come from more than 230 different backgrounds and 135 different faith groups.

We are enriched by that diversity, but know that we can never be complacent when it comes to social inclusion.

We see all those who work so hard to ensure that we live harmoniously. To ensure that we see and celebrate difference, but never overlook the commonalities between us, irrespective of background.

We also see that culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians are under-represented in many parts of industry and community life. It is something we need to address.

And we need to be vigilant – to guard against – hate speech, and anything else that breeds fear and suspicion. Any of it is too much. We all share the responsibility to ensure that it never takes hold. I very much like the warning of the WW2 German cleric, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who said that *‘Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.’*

When it comes to women in Australia, we know that they remain under-represented in leadership roles, and over-represented as victims of violence, including in their own homes.

I am proud though that there are such encouraging signs in our State.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence has set a standard for discussion and implementation across Australia.

Women make up 50% of the Victorian Cabinet.

We have seen government Boards increase the percentage of women from 36% in 2015 to 53% in February 2018.

And although pay parity is still 14%, or \$242 per week, lower for Australian women than their male counterparts, in Victoria, it is 9.6% lower, having improved by 2.1% since 2018.

There is some progress.

We can be proud of the industry and innovation in Victoria, as we have moved from traditional to advanced manufacturing.

There is phenomenal growth in our start-up and tech ecosystem in Melbourne. The *2019 Savill's Cities Index* has named Melbourne as one of 30 global centres at the forefront of tech, with a start-up ecosystem growing at 23% every year, placing us in the top five for the world's strongest early stage growth centres.

Something I have seen in sharp focus is just how innovation lies within what we do in so many different spheres. When we talk of innovation, we often think of young entrepreneurs in T-shirts, dreaming up ideas around table tennis tables in the inner city.

Thankfully, they do exist. And they create many exciting businesses.

But we have come to recognise the clever innovation entrenched within so many factories and offices and, in particular, on the land.

We profit greatly from those who develop new ways to mine for the gold that still lies beneath our State. Or those who imagine new logistics to speed up the processing of containers in Victoria's port - the busiest container port in Australia. Or the ones who develop a bionic eye, or satellite assisted growth for our crops.

When it comes to industry, agriculture is still important to us. We punch well above our weight when you contemplate that Victoria comprises only 3% of the Australian landmass, but accounts for 27% of the country's food and fibre exports.

International education remains our biggest service export, with Victoria supporting nearly 33% of international education services. That translates to some 230,000 students each year.

Of course, that potted version of our strengths overlooks the many flourishing industries including technology, particularly in areas as diverse as agritech, medtech, sportstech, fintech and cybertech.

One of our challenges is to ensure that we keep developing a skilled workforce to keep up with rapid change. The skills shortage, and the appreciation of just how important vocational and technical training is to our future prosperity, (not just in Victoria, of course), is a whole topic within itself.

As is the need for more young people to study science, technology, engineering and maths. For now, girls are particularly important to us. We need 100% of our talent pool in these important areas of study and industry.

We talk proudly of Melbourne's liveability. It is not imagined.

Our city is ringed by magnificent gardens. It is laid out in a perfect grid. And it hosts a calendar of sports and cultural events that are unrivalled. I do mean unrivalled. Melbourne is the only city in the world that has both a Grand Slam tennis event and a Formula One Grand Prix!

And Melbournians also have an unequalled enthusiasm to attend events. Our AFL Grand Final saw more than 100,000 people in attendance, but at the same stadium one week before, a crowd of around 170,000 attended across two games!

At the same time, our NGV is the 16th most visited gallery anywhere in the world: our library the 4th most visited public library. We are of course an UNESCO City of Literature. We have the oldest symphony orchestra (the MSO), and the oldest and largest theatre company (the MTC).

Something that really stands out to us in this role is the fundamental goodness that abounds in our community.

We know that one in three Victorians volunteer. They give their time and resources to look after the environment, run local sporting events, help newcomers to settle, deliver meals to those who cannot cook for themselves or help care for an otherwise isolated neighbour. The list really could go on and on.

What the figures or, for that matter, a list can never tell us, is the generosity of spirit that pervades our State. The philanthropy that underpins so much that we hold dear. The generosity of spirit that the individual volunteers bring to what they do for others.

And, something that is not sufficiently emphasised or celebrated: the extraordinary generosity of business.

I cannot begin to recount the number of times we see business stepping up in big ways, but also in quiet and small ways to help their communities.

I do not think we speak enough about the kindness within our community. We should. We must. It is not a 'soft' topic. It is a fundamental topic. It will underpin a strong and successful State.

And so, after that collection of fairly random topics – admittedly touched upon ever so lightly – that brings me back to you, Melbourne Forum.

Your well-subscribed membership and events suggest that you are doing something important.

People enjoy gathering through you. You promote discussion of social, economic, cultural, political and public policy issues. Issues that are of relevance locally, nationally and internationally.

We do not have sufficient public discourse. Or when we have it, it is not always of a calibre that brings substance. Opinions are sometimes too readily given in a limited number of characters. On some of the most fundamental societal issues, we see vox pops being conducted in the media, asking us to 'vote' whether or not we are 'for' or 'against' a certain proposition. Discussions are often polarised. Shallow and facile.

I like what Barack Obama said just a few weeks ago, when he warned young people that a mere tweet or a hashtag being judgmental about someone, is not actually the way to effect change.

Melbourne Forum has created a space for discussion. As you can guess, I use the word 'space' in a figurative sense. You specifically do not have a 'space' as a meeting place for your group.

Melbourne Forum has never been about a physical space. Just as it has never been gender specific. Age has been no barrier. Nor background. Members come from all different backgrounds.

If I say that I am impressed by your vision, you know it is sincere. I was an early subscriber to membership.

You appear to have realised your vision in what is a relatively short time.

Congratulations to everyone who has been involved across that decade. Founding Chair, Mr John Ridley AM and current Chair, Professor Emeritus Andrea Hull AO, past and present Board members and Executive Officer, Ms Lyndall Tenant.

And to all those who give up their time to form the Program, Membership and Communication Committees and associated task groups. And to the members.

Of course, finally, congratulations to everyone involved, and 'Happy 10th Anniversary Melbourne Forum'.