



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

AUSTRALIA DAY 2020 FLAG-RAISING CEREMONY

Sunday 26th January 2020

The Honourable Daniel Andrews MP, Premier of Victoria

The Honourable Michael O'Brien MP, Leader of the Opposition

The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor of Melbourne Cr Sally Capp

Assistant Commissioner Luke Cornelius, Victoria Police, representing the Chief Commissioner

Commissioner Andrew Crisp APM, Emergency Management Victoria

Senior Members of the Australian Defence Force

Members of the Consular Corps

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering: those who have cared for this land for millennia. And, mindful of the painful aspects of history, I particularly thank Aunty Joy for her warm welcome to country and pay my respects to Elders past and present and to Elders here with us this morning.

Each year, as Australia Day approaches, we reflect upon and celebrate what it means to be Australian.

This year, just now, celebration feels far away, and yet what it means to be Australian has never been clearer to us.

As so much of Australia has fallen under the cloud – literally and figuratively – of the massive bushfires that have caused such painful loss: loss of life, homes, businesses, stock, wildlife and millions of hectares of land, we do not need to look far to reflect upon and be inspired by what it means to be Australian.

The worst of circumstances in our nation has shown us the very best of our people.

We have watched gratefully as our firefighters and emergency services personnel have worked so hard and so bravely across these difficult weeks. In many instances, looking after the property of others while their own has been at risk. And we know that the battle continues.

We have seen that some have paid the ultimate price for their selflessness, and we recognise the care that must be wrapped around their loved ones, their friends and their workmates – so many caught in the rippled anguish of loss.

We have watched the men and women of our ADF – their rescue skills and their grit as they work on the clean-up, but also their kindness. A smile. A game to cheer up a nervous youngster heading into the belly of a Navy vessel, or a pat for an anxious family pet.

We have seen a different army as well – an army of people who work behind the scenes, in headquarters and centres around the State, taking emergency calls and dispatching help, mapping fires, tracking weather or even managing rosters. The list goes on and on.

We have seen the generosity of the many businesses that have simply opened their doors to ensure supplies are on hand. Whatever, whenever and however needed.

And all the community organisations who have been mustered to step in, offering practical help: shelter, clothing and food. As well as moral support. A shoulder to cry on. Taking time from their own families to extend care to others.

We have seen the ingenuity of individuals and organisations as they find ways to help. Cooking for the firefighters or for those sheltered in Community Halls. Trucking in feed and water for hungry stock. Crafting pouches and blankets for injured koalas and joeys.

We have seen Victorians giving – donating money and goods – and volunteering hours, days and weeks of their time.

And we have seen leaders, some of whom are here today, who have worked tirelessly – day and night and for weeks – in the office, and in the field, to ensure that we have been kept informed, and that resources are marshalled.

And what we see is that whether it is those in the direct line of the fires, or those who give of themselves to help, it is not about who they are or where they come from. What language they speak, their background or religion, or who has lived here for a long time or a short time.

Whether it's Aboriginal Victorians who work alongside our forest fire managers, Sikhs from Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs distributing meals in Gippsland, our sports and film stars pledging millions of dollars, tradies leaving their holidays to take their skills to wherever they're needed, or kids on the streets with their cake stalls raising money to help save wounded wildlife: we see that we are all in this together.

Last year, as the Patron of the Ten Year Commemoration of the 2009 bushfires, I saw something else.

I saw the capacity of community after community to come together – to help their towns to rise from the ashes. To find the resilience to start over. To succeed in rebuilding. To pursue the long recovery process. I saw so many strong and committed women and men.

This year, we do not have to look far to find the essence of who we are and what we can celebrate on Australia Day. In fact, on any day.

Let's not lose sight of that throughout the year, as we wish each other and all those working to fight the fires, a safe and happy Australia Day.