

**FAIRLEY LA TROBE LECTURE: Wednesday 24 July 2024 Shepparton**

**“We might think that we know our State well”**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**Andrew Fairley AM, Chair and Trustees, Sir Andrew and Lady Fairley Foundation**

**Professor Theo Farrell, Vice Chancellor, Councillors, Advisory Board Members and Staff, La Trobe University**

**Sam Birrell MP, Federal Member for Nicholls**

**Mayor Shane Sali and Councillors, Greater Shepparton City Council**

**Roger Gillespie OAM and Lesley Gillespie OAM, Gillespie Family Foundation**

**Peter Johnson OAM, Community Leader Shepparton**

**Ross McPherson AM, Executive Chairman McPherson Media Group**

May I join in acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we gather, and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and to Elders of other communities who may be with us.

**INTRODUCTION**

It is a pleasure to be with you this evening, to deliver the Fairley La Trobe Lecture.

That said, in my experience, any normal person approaches a Lecture like this with trepidation. It is daunting to see the calibre, credentials and erudite topics covered by those who have preceded you.

Despite that, the honour of delivering this Lecture in the name of a great Victorian, partnered with a great Victorian university, is not lost on me.

There is much that set Sir Andrew Fairley apart from most of us. He was not only a brilliant and visionary businessman, but also a brilliant and visionary leader in his local community - and much further afield.

This Lecture in his name is a just recognition of his many contributions.

I am proud too to extend my connection with La Trobe University this evening. I have an Honorary Doctorate in Law from the University, have officiated at the installation of two of its Chancellors, and I have launched, (that is, turned the first sod...a very hard sod to turn, I recall), and later opened, several parts of the impressive sports facility at Bundoora.

### **CHOOSING A TOPIC**

Turning to my choice of topic, I note that, not surprisingly, most of those who have preceded me in this Lecture have emphasised regional Victoria.

So, let me start with a disclaimer.

I have always lived in the city. I am not of country Victoria. I do not purport to have the experience and expertise of many of you in this room.

Indeed, I don't propose talking **exclusively** of regional Victoria this evening. But of Victoria.

And I **do** have a reasonably detailed overview of Victoria, from the perspective of a former Governor with eight years in that role.

## **THE GOVERNOR'S ROLE**

For context, let me briefly explain the role to you.

It has four main parts.

The first is constitutional. The Governor, as the representative of the Head of State, is the guardian of the State's constitution and democratic processes, remembering that in our Federation, each State retains its own sovereignty.

This part of the role sees the Governor responsible for overseeing the dissolution of parliament and elections, and chairing the Executive Council at which Ministers decide on judicial and other high-level appointments, regulations and dealings with Crown land.

And, of course, it is the Governor's role to grant Royal Assent before legislation that has passed through the parliament can become law.

The second part of the role is ceremonial. The Governor officiates at Australian Honours' ceremonies and on significant public occasions such as Anzac Day.

It matters. When the Governor addresses from the steps of the Shrine, he or she does so as an apolitical figure, representing all Victorians, regardless of for whom they voted.

The third part of the role - the community part - takes much of the Governor's day-to-day time. It includes highlighting, thanking and congratulating the brilliant contributions of Victorians to every sector and every aspect of community life.

And in modern times, there has been an emphasis on a fourth part of the role: fostering and promoting Victoria's international relations – its economic, social and cultural ties.

When I became Governor in 2015, I thought I knew our State and its people quite well.

In the criminal, coroners, magistrate and family courts, I had seen a broad slice of life. So too, in sports, arts, hospital, educational, research and various other organisations and areas in which I had a connection.

But I did not know our State as deeply as I had thought. The Governorship gave me many new perspectives and the privilege of new learning.

This evening, I want to share some of that learning with you.

Some you may not readily know. Some you will know well.

Let me start there.

## **VICTORIA IS NOT JUST MELBOURNE**

### **Sharper focus as Governor**

Something of course I knew - but that was brought into much sharper focus for me as Governor - is that Victoria is so much more than just Melbourne.

Of course, people in this room do know that.

Melburnians know it too, but I suspect that many don't turn their minds to it as often as they could.

I can't tell you the number of times people would say to us: '*We knew you were home because the flag was flying at Government House.*' I'm sure they must have thought me agoraphobic, as the gold of the Governor's Standard flew atop the recognisable tower almost 24/7 across 8 years.

Of course, it flew almost 24/7 because the Governor is the Governor for the whole of Victoria. So long as the Governor is anywhere in the State, the flag flies. It is only missing if the Governor is out of the State.

### **Historically**

Historically, Governors have always spent time across the colony or state. The frequency and length of visits has varied according to the times - and the predilections of different Governors.

The trips of Charles La Trobe, our first Lieutenant-Governor, (as the role was then - Victoria still being a colony and not yet a state), were legion. He was, amongst other things, an experienced botanist and an amateur geologist. He loved the natural world, so was drawn to the regions.

During his time in office, he undertook something like ninety-four major horse-back rides through country Victoria, - often long journeys – as far afield as Mt Gambier in the west and deep into Gippsland in the east.

In the less distant past, Governors travelled by rail, staying in one of several specially fitted Vice-Regal train carriages, while meeting car and driver at various sidings for local tours.

Former Aide to the Governor, the late Angus Trumble, dubbed such a carriage as a *miniature Government House on wheels*.

Built in 1948, and used occasionally on visits by The Queen, the last of the carriages was retired in the 1990s. Today, a remaining carriage has been preserved and another, I believe, is stored not too far from here, at the Seymour Railway Heritage Centre.

### **My time in Regional Victoria**

Growing up in Melbourne, like many Melburnians, my first and primary experience of the country was the Royal Melbourne Show (as it was called then). It was, and remains, an important element in at least introducing city kids to country life, livestock and produce.

Certainly, life as a magistrate and coroner in my first ten years on the bench, saw me sit in regional as well as city courts, and enlivened me to social issues in many parts of our State.

It also exposed me to some regional history, sitting in courthouses that had borne witness to the local goings on across many decades. And it exposed me to the realisation that, 'out of sight/out of mind', left many of them scrambling to be fit for purpose.

Then 18 years as a judge in the Family Court of Australia introduced me more closely to some of the economic realities that impacted those on the land – most particularly, a heightened appreciation of intergenerational relationships with farmland, and, in that context, the added complexities that family breakdown introduced.

During my time as Governor, Tony and I both found spending time in regional and rural Victoria a highlight.

We tried to move the emphasis away from what had been traditional 'Regional Tours', whereby the Governor had set off for 4 or 5 days at a time, in an updated version of the old horseback and swag or Vice-Regal carriage days.

I felt strongly that in addition to those longer visits, that for the parts of our State where it was feasible, we should come and go, as it were, enjoying seamless day or overnight visits, without it necessarily being a bigger 'production'.

Ironically, the lockdowns of COVID presented us with new opportunities to 'visit' the regions.

Virtual tours and chats facilitated a reimagining of contact.

It enabled us to undertake 'mini' regional tours during which we could, for example, be briefed by mayors and councillors, and visit farms, health services, community groups, local shops and other businesses. And we could be 'grilled' by curious schoolkids, all without anyone leaving home.

After COVID, we continued to use that reimagined communication to check in with communities in the midst of crises, such as floods or bushfires. That way, our 'check in' would not significantly divert focus and resources from where they were needed most – with those directly affected.

We could then visit in real life a little later, when the media caravan had moved on, and we could quietly hear from, and thank, those involved.

We became well aware of the long tail of such disasters when, in 2019, we travelled for three weeks through the areas worst affected by the devastating bushfires 10 years' earlier. And, again, spending time in communities after the October 2022 floods, about which, of course, you in this region have direct experience.

### **VICTORIA HAS A MULTITUDE OF STRENGTHS**

So, let me turn to some of the enormous strengths that we have discovered within our State.



Strengths that I think sometimes go unnoticed or are, at the very least, under-recognised. We sometimes more readily emphasise the challenges, (and I will come to some of those a little later).

As, happily, there is much we can celebrate, I have chosen just a few to mention.

### **Agriculture**

I want to start – and deal briefly- with our significant strength in agriculture.

I say ‘briefly’, because there are likely to be many here with first-hand knowledge and expertise that far exceeds my own, this part of the State exemplifying the strength of the sector.

But experience tells me that for many Victorians it is only top of mind when a crisis of one form or another threatens our food supply chain. Otherwise, they may not necessarily be aware of all that we have of which to be proud in this regard.

As Governor, I made official visits that covered many countries in Asia, Europe and the UK, the Middle East and the Americas.

Invariably, these visits included meetings focused on our agricultural sector. I know the immense interest in our premium produce and processed dairy and food products.

It brought home to us just how much we need to appreciate its importance to our economy and quality of life.

The reality is that Victoria profits from a favourable combination of geographic diversity, resilience and innovation.

Our geographic diversity enables us to produce a vast variety of high-quality agricultural produce, and it means that we punch well above our weight.

At only 3% of Australia's land mass, our State consistently accounts for around 25% of the nation's food and fibre exports.

We are the largest sheep meat producing State, contributing almost half of the nation's production.

We remain Australia's largest dairying state, producing nearly two-thirds of Australia's milk.

And we are the second largest horticulture producer in Australia, accounting for around one quarter of Australia's 7.1 million tonnes of horticultural produce.

While Victoria has many natural advantages, our successes also highlight the resilience of our farmers and producers.

They meet the devastation of floods, bushfires, droughts and hail.

They deal with the uncertainties around climate change, energy transition, and the impact of policy decisions, whether about water or tariffs, or regulation. They are dealing with rising utility and labour costs.

These are all challenges well known to you in this region.

So too is the innovation that our farmers, and those who work along the food supply chain, have contributed to the sector.

Victoria's regions have been renowned for value adding – bringing out the best in our produce through a thriving food processing sector. Of course, SPC has been a leader in that regard.

### **Med-tech/Biotech/Life Sciences**

Let me shift gear and talk of innovation and brilliance in another context.

Victoria has undisputed expertise and a sophisticated ecosystem in med-tech, biotech and life sciences.

I have seen that up close from a number of perspectives - touring relevant parts of our hospitals, universities, research institutes and businesses, as well as giving awards to and meeting with many of our clever researchers and entrepreneurs.

I'm not sure that all Victorians realise, for example:

- That Victoria is home to CSL, the second largest influenza vaccine manufacturer in the world,
- That 70% of the top 25 Australian med-tech and pharma companies are based in Victoria,

- That nearly 60% of our nation's pharmaceutical exports are from Victoria, or
- That our life sciences here employ more than 100,000 people.

It would be rare for opportunities and partnerships in this sector not to be on the agenda during our official visits overseas. Indeed, we have been invited to visit a number of the world's top institutions that are already collaborating with or seeking to collaborate with Victoria.

One of the last such visits was to the Jenner Institute at Oxford University, where we met with some of the team that had helped to develop the COVID-19 vaccine. They spoke of the direct connections between Oxford and Victorian researchers – both there, and here in Melbourne.

The flip side of that coin is that, except for some unrelated single purpose visits, it would be uncommon for international delegations to visit Victoria without including our Parkville and/or Monash Precincts in their itineraries.

There is so much of which to be proud.

For example, a new Australian Institute for Infectious Diseases – the largest in the southern hemisphere – is being established in the Melbourne biomedical precinct in Parkville.

For some years, Monash University has retained its high world ranking in Pharmacy and Pharmacology, recognised in the 2023 QS World Universities

Ranking by Subject as #2, sitting between Harvard at #1 and Oxford at #3.  
Not bad company!

Monash University also hosts the Victorian mRNA Innovation Hub, a collaborative initiative to develop next-generation mRNA vaccines and therapeutics to treat a range of diseases. UK based *Moderna* has based its regional R&D and manufacturing mRNA facilities there.

I should add that German company, *BioNtech* has also chosen Victoria - and La Trobe University - to establish its own regional base for mRNA research, and for the manufacturing of candidates for clinical trials in the Asia-Pacific region.

Lest anyone think that it is just local bias that sees Victorians' pride in our State's med-tech, biotech and life sciences more broadly, there is firm proof that our pride is not misdirected.

One illustration, chosen from amongst many, I think proves the point.

In 2022, Canadian and New Zealand citizen, Mr Geoffrey Cumming, a prominent businessman and philanthropist, donated \$250 million to the University of Melbourne, to establish a new Global Centre for Pandemic Therapeutics, to sit within the Doherty Institute.

It is the largest philanthropic donation to medical research, and one of the largest gifts in Australia's history.

Mr Cumming has explained that he chose Melbourne over other leading centres of medical research, because of the breadth of talent in our research ecosystem, the collegiality within it and the scale and enduring nature of medical research investment here.

### **Universities**

If I tell you that something else that I discovered as Governor was just how much our universities matter, you would probably say *Of course, we all know they matter*. The more so, with such a fine one embedded right here in this community.

But – to my discredit or otherwise - it was only as Governor that I came to understand just how much our universities matter, beyond just the high calibre of their teaching and research.

Of course, it is an obvious feather in Australia's cap that so many of our universities are ranked highly in international tables.

We can take particular pride in the University of Melbourne's position as Australia's number one, with the 2023 QS rankings placing it at 13<sup>th</sup> in the world.

We can also be proud that La Trobe University, like Monash, (which is also in the top 50), RMIT and Deakin each have the kudos of rising a significant number of places.

We should also bear in mind that the relationships that our universities foster through international students so often form the basis of close

business and political links of the future – with important cultural and economic dividends.

These are amongst the dividends that should be weighed in the mix, when government formulates policy around the number of international students to be welcomed here.

Our academics and researchers also contribute to strong global connections. I have already observed that they frequently model the best in collaboration. Importantly, such collaboration often transcends the ebb and flow of the geopolitics of the day.

During the pandemic, despite sometimes frosty political and diplomatic relations between Australia and China, researchers here continued to collaborate with their peers there, with the singular and shared focus of scientific advancement.

I have been particularly struck by the central role that our universities so often play at the vanguard of diplomacy: often as the first into a region.

RMIT University's connection with Vietnam is a good case in point.

Across the last 10 years or so, our federal and state governments, recognising Vietnam's economy as one of the fastest growing in the region, have been pursuing expanded cooperation in defence and security, economic engagement and education.

But in 2000, well before those strategies had matured, RMIT Vietnam was established, and was already growing into a leading university there, offering programs and courses identical to those offered at RMIT University Melbourne, across two campuses in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, now with an enrolment of over 7,000 students.

None of this is new to La Trobe University.

It is a university with particularly strong teaching and research links with over 120 partners in more than 30 countries, including its own significant and long-standing partnership with Hanoi University.

Some, like its partnership with East China Normal University (ECNU), have been amongst the longest Australian-Chinese university partnerships, spanning almost 30 years.

### **Start-ups/Innovation**

I referred to innovation a little earlier.

I think our State's growing achievements are often under-estimated.

I wonder how many Victorians are aware that 19 unicorn companies have been founded right here in Victoria.

And that the 2023 Global Startup Ecosystem Report has recorded Melbourne as one of the fastest growing early-stage ecosystems,



having increased by 56% to nearly \$37 billion in the last year, with particular strengths in fintech, life sciences, enterprise services, big data and AI.

But start-ups are not only born in Melbourne. We have seen innovation hubs and incubators in various parts of the State.

I recall a terrific roundtable in Bendigo, with clever entrepreneurs who had chosen to live in that beautiful part of our State, confident in the knowledge that tech enabled them to develop their businesses from wherever they chose to be located.

I do note that, not surprisingly, many of our brightest entrepreneurs and founders in Melbourne were grown and educated in the State's regions.

A standout for me – and one that I can't overlook as I stand here is Grant Petty, a man from this very part of our State, having attended Shepparton South Tech in the eighties.

Early in my time as Governor, aware that it had won a load of design and export awards, I visited the HQ of his innovative company, *Blackmagic Designs*.

*Blackmagic* is a leading manufacturer of clever and compact video technology, favoured in movie centres around the world, including both Hollywood and Bollywood.

Now also a leader in AI technology, *Blackmagic* operates in Australia, the UK, the USA, Europe and Asia-Pacific, employs more than 1600 staff and has a turnover of billions of dollars.

Indeed, we have seen many businesses that put us on the international map in various sectors. That is, businesses about which – again – as Victorians, we can be proud, but about which most of us have little knowledge.

These businesses also hail from every part of our State.

*Gecko Pty Ltd*, a company we visited in Ballarat, is a great example of one such quiet but significant achiever.

Started by *Legend of Mining*, (literally, as named at the International Mining and Resource Conference last year), Elizabeth Lewis-Gray, and renowned inventor and innovator, Sandy Gray, *Gecko* is a world leader in gold and silver processing technology and consulting.

Since its founding in 1996, it has diversified its operations into the renewable energy and medical technology sectors.

Indeed, the segue into medical technology tells its own story about regional Victoria and innovation - audacious innovation. And community involvement.

The story is set in the dark days of early COVID times. Like the rest of the world, Australia and Victoria were caught unprepared for a global pandemic.

As we lamented our lack of stockpiles of relevant equipment, and regretted the demise of our sovereign manufacturing, the *Committee for Ballarat* became concerned that, in the event of a significant outbreak of COVID in their region, they would not be able to meet a local demand for ventilators.

So, they approached *Gecko Systems* to build some. Owners Sandy and Elizabeth were up for the challenge.

Sandy had the creative and technical skills to build the core technologies, but he had no expertise as to the working of a ventilator in a clinical setting.

The Committee for Ballarat connected him with two local anaesthetists for that competency, a local tech company, *Eurekative*, to assist with the prototype, and the *Ballarat Innovation Research Collaboration for Health*, to assist with the research and clinical evaluation required for approval from the Therapeutics Goods Administration (TGA).

As well as many other businesses and organisations collaborating with them, local businesses and community provided critical funds. So too did government. They succeeded.

## **Multiculturalism**

Time does not permit me to talk of other areas of economic strength including in aviation and aerospace, international education, creative industries and professional services, but I can't leave a snapshot of our State's strengths without turning to its multiculturalism.

Across some decades, we have prided ourselves on the strength of our multiculturalism.

I have always felt confident that our pride was not misplaced. The diversity of skills, experiences and cultures brought by those who've come to our shores have so obviously enriched us. And, generally, we've enjoyed an harmonious melding of our peoples.

Certainly, Tony and I have seen so much to celebrate.

We have met and seen the work of many wonderful individuals and organisations, committed to welcoming and settling newcomers.

The *Peter Scanlan Foundation*, for one example, worked closely with us at Government House, facilitating a project dear to our hearts, hosting socially isolated women from many different countries and backgrounds, to enable them to meet us and each other, in the knowledge that these were important ways to help them, and therefore their families, expand their social networks and settle in their new home.

We have visited Multicultural Centres across the State, participated in so many events designed to bring us together and met Victorians of all different backgrounds who work so conscientiously to that end.

A favourite event – within just weeks of being sworn in - was the Unity Cup and the Women’s Walk of Solidarity, held here at the Rumbalara and Congupna Football/Netball game in the 2015 AFL Multicultural Round, when I was amongst a large group of women who walked to show their commitment to social cohesion.

No matter how many successes we have seen up close, I have consistently emphasised that successful multiculturalism is always a work in progress.

And so, that leads me to some of the challenges we face as a State.

## **VICTORIA CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

### **Challenges**

In saying that successful multiculturalism is always a work in progress, what I meant was that we could never rest on our laurels or take a rose-coloured view of the social cohesion that we had **mostly** achieved.

What I never meant – and certainly never imagined – was just how fragile that social cohesion could be.

How is it that fractures can be so quick to surface?

Is it that, when we have talked of our successful harmony, we have overlooked that often we live parallel rather than overlapping or interlocking lives?

Have we too often- and simplistically- thought that diversity mainly relates to the variety of magnificent cuisines from which we can choose, or the many colourful festivals that we enjoy?

As we have seen in the last year, international events do test us, especially when the heartache of them is directly felt amongst us here.

And that heartache cannot be downplayed. Understandably, emotions run high.

But, paradoxically, importing the hatred within such global conflicts is innately contrary to what has brought so many of us to make Australia home. Individuals and families from all over the world have sought safe harbour here, relishing a peaceful existence free from hatred and conflict.

We must keep working to preserve and promote that.

Just as we are all uplifted by the freedoms embedded in our democracy, and the dearest of our rights, the freedom to speak freely and to express opinions, we are all – as individuals, as a community and as a nation – diminished by prejudice and hatred directed towards any group.

If we accept it, or even if we are indifferent to it, we are all imperilled by it. Although the targeted group may change from time to time, divisiveness becomes the norm. The social cohesion that profits us all is undermined.

We all have much work to do. ALL of us. We simply have too much to lose if we don't.

Meanwhile, we must be realistic in recognising and rising to meet other challenges as well. They are no secret.

We face cost of living pressures, troubling levels of government debt, a rapidly growing population, housing shortages, an ageing population, climate change and the complexities of the energy transition, and – may I take the opportunity to emphasise, as Chair of *Beyond Blue*, the continuing need for well-targeted mental health support.

### **Solutions**

How do meet them? How do we find solutions?

First, although some may feel especially pressing in our State, as Governor, I saw up close that the most wicked of the challenges were universal.

When the Minister for Education in the UAE spoke of mental health issues amongst youngsters after COVID, she could have been speaking about our kids. When the Mayors of Milan and London spoke agonisingly about energy issues, it sounded all too familiar. So too in Japan, as officials were grappling with the care of an ageing population. And housing shortages were clearly front of mind when as the President of Singapore spoke when we were together.

Such meetings left me with the strong view that, although we must continue to strive to deal with these challenges on a local level, if we are too parochial and too simply party-political in our vision, we will miss the opportunity to look collectively and to collaborate and learn from further afield.

We saw with the urgently needed development of a COVID-19 vaccine that what previously would have been considered as impossible, was achieved by the broadest collaboration – with the gathering of brilliant minds across nations.

On another level, I have no doubt that the challenges can never be well and fully met while we debate them, and any of the ‘big ticket’ or complex issues, with our current level of public discourse. It needs to improve.

In my last Australia Day address in 2023, well aware of the controversy surrounding the date of our national day, I focused on the imperative, in the words of President Obama to talk to each other in ‘*a way that heals*’, rather than in ‘*a way that wounds*’. That is, in that debate, (or any other), to emphasise our common purpose, which cannot be achieved with scrappy or insulting sound bites.

How we achieve that, depends on us all. From what we ourselves model to whom we elect to our parliaments, and what we make clear we expect from them.



## **Volunteering and Leadership**

Alive to the challenges we face, I can still say that I have left the Governorship with a feeling of optimism about 'us'. I have seen not only the cleverness, but also the kindness and the community leadership that abounds.

The kindness could not be in sharper focus than when we look at how we step up to help each other.

Across Australia, it is estimated that in any one year, nearly 6 million of us volunteer, contributing almost 600 million hours of time and expertise.

But, importantly, behind the numbers, it is the generosity of spirit, the connection and what becomes possible through the contribution of volunteers that makes a difference.

It's a difference that cannot be quantified, but it can be seen in school breakfast programs, hospital bedside visits, the reading to vision impaired, warm meals for those fighting to protect their community from fire, the support of a young mum as she learns how to parent or sitting with a frightened witness in a courtroom.

The list goes on. And we know that the rate of volunteering is higher in our regions than in our cities.

Our innate goodness can be seen too in our philanthropists and donors who support hospitals, schools, arts, sports and community programs across our State.

Such selflessness is evident in many organisations right here. It is epitomised, for example, through the many who contribute to programs run by the *Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project*, dedicated to ensuring that young people reach their full potential and thrive. I am sure that some of these volunteers are here this evening.

I have seen it too at the *Rumbalara Football Netball Club*, through our friends Kay and Paul Briggs AO, and the many impressive role models who invest so much time at that terrific club. (I'm not just saying that because I'm a former patron and number one ticketholder there!) And in their other wide-ranging contributions, including to The Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence, which I understand is about to open, holding great promise to the region.

When it comes to leadership, we can be confident of a pipeline of bright, young and committed leaders amongst us. I have met many across the State, and enjoyed watching the range of programs that help them to develop.

An understanding of the value in growing leaders is not new to this region.

The *Fairley Leadership* program, now having reverted, I believe, to its original name of *Goulbourn Valley Community Leadership* has been producing Fairley Fellows for around 25 years now.

Both surveys and anecdotes have shown a marked increase in the participation in leadership positions held by Fairley Fellows, in primary schools, secondary colleges, councils, and other local community organisations.

I do note that, throughout our modern history, we have drawn many leaders from our regions as well as our cities.

Our political leaders are just one illustration of that.

Forty-seven men and two women have been Premier of our State. Putting to one side the many foreign-born Premiers of colonial times, 26 have been born in Victoria. Of those 'homegrown' Premiers, fifteen, or more than 50% of them, have been born in the regions.

For completeness, I note that others spent formative years in our regions, including Sir John McDonald, the 37th man to hold the office who, for a time, lived in Shepparton.

And, interestingly, a similar analysis of Australian Prime Ministers tells us that around 40% of them were born in regional Australia.

I am confident the exercise could be replicated across many sectors.

What a testament to our regions. Is it that better leadership is organically developed in smaller communities? Is it that independence, innovation and resilience are simply better learned in those settings?

Certainly, it supports great educational institutions being located in the regions, not only to promote equitable access to education, but also to help grow the talent - wherever it resides - to contribute to our state's productivity and well-being.

Let me finish on this note.

Victoria has so much of which to be proud. And, as elsewhere, there is still much to do and to which we must aspire.

Victoria will be the greater if the leaders that we grow in every corner of our State model to us:

- How to address the hard issues with robust but respectful debate,
- How to embrace and celebrate our diversity, to enhance every family, every institution, every business and every community,
- How to ensure that we continue to bring forth bold and brilliant ideas and be equally bold in commercialising the stunning research that we have proven time and time again), and
- How to lead with the moral clarity that ensures our success as a State.

Perhaps it is pertinent to conclude: May we continue to grow community leaders - and volunteers - like Sir Andrew Fairley.