



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

**GOVERNOR OF VICTORIA
EXPORT AWARDS 2021
Friday 29 October 2021**

The Honourable Martin Pakula, Minister for Trade and Minister for Industry Support and Recovery,
Gönül Serbest, CEO, Global Victoria,
Steph Lysaght, Consul-General to the United Kingdom, and other members of the Consular Corps,
Rebecca Hall, Commissioner for Victoria to South East Asia,
Tim Piper, Executive Director, AiGroup,
Distinguished guests

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land from which I am joining you, and I pay my respects to Elders, past and present, and to Elders of other communities who may be with us.

I am so pleased to be joining you today. This is my seventh year of the Governor of Victoria Export Awards, and they have been a consistent highlight of my time in office. Through them, I have been introduced to some of our State's finest businesses and business leaders.

There isn't a person here, I'm sure, who needs any convincing as to the importance of, and the pride we can have in Victoria's exports.

Anyone who comes from government knows how important exports are to the economy of our State, and to Victoria's international relationships.

All of you, from the broad range of business sectors represented here, know it first-hand.

You are the ones who carry the risks of business, and international business.

You're the ones who skilfully build and maintain relationships, adjusting to different cultural norms. You deal with fluctuating rates of exchange, and the changing landscapes of tariffs and trade agreements.

The hard yards that you always put in have, of course, been all the harder across the last few years.

Some of you have had to develop new business ideas. Others have successfully adapted existing ones to find new destinations for your products or services.

All of you have had to contend with the compounding complexities of lockdowns and freight, border and logistical issues. Significant geo-political upheavals too.

I understand that for most of you attending this event, your business outlook goes beyond State or even national borders. You necessarily have an international perspective on your businesses. But as you are Victorian companies, and I am the Governor of Victoria, you'll understand if I focus a few comments specifically on our State.

Victoria has taken a battering during this difficult time. But we are certainly not alone in that. A global pandemic proves to us that the world is truly a small place. There would be few economies anywhere that have not felt the negative impact of this disease.

I am confident, however, about our future here in this State.

Victoria was economically strong, and a clever and successful State before the pandemic. The cleverness, the innovation and the acumen that resided within our business sector has not changed.

It's been on display in the many *pivots* you've made. (Actually, just a quick aside. I hope that we can agree not to use the over-worked word *pivot* after this!)

And now, your skills and ideas will be essential to growing our economy stronger and better than ever. We can profit from the new learnings on sovereign manufacturing, future skills, digitisation and fresh markets, amongst them.

I am sure the Minister will have more to say about the way we will be growing.

A particular joy for me has been visiting exporters who have featured each year in these awards. My enthusiasm for these visits will be apparent if I tell you that, despite what can be described as an unsettled year, I have been fortunate to be hosted by six of the nine winners from last year.

It was interesting to see just how many of these great exporters had stepped up to meet the needs of the COVID effort both here and overseas, venturing into the production of PPE, ventilators and parts, virus detection equipment, thermometers and hand sanitiser.

But that has not been their sole focus. These visits, alongside those of previous years, have introduced me to many people, products and services, and to the varied stories of the history and evolution of the businesses too.

I was struck by that when, earlier this year, I visited Ego Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of innovative skincare products.

This is a business that was founded here as a home-based business by a German born chemist, Gerald Oppenheim, and his wife, Rae, in 1953 (a vintage year in my view, but you might need to think for just a moment as to why I might say that).

Although it was some years before they made tentative steps into export markets in Singapore, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand, today Ego, (still in family hands), has staff in 31 cities across 13 countries.

I know that each business that will be recognised today has its own story too. I will look forward to learning more about each of them.

But I do know that each one put forward should be particularly proud to be a part of these prestigious awards.

A warm congratulations to each one of you and, without intending any pressure at all, might I mention to those who receive an award, that Victorian companies have always performed extremely well at the national awards to follow.

So best of luck, and thank you too to everyone connected with the organising and judging of the Awards today.