



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE CIVIC RECEPTION

Thursday 27 February 2025

Acknowledgments

The Honourable Tim Bull MP, Member for Gippsland East, Shadow Minister for Disability, Ageing, Carers and Volunteers, Shadow Minister for Racing, and Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs

The Honourable Darren Chester MP, Federal Member for Gippsland

Her Honour Judge Wendy Wilmoth, County Court of Victoria

Councillor John White, Mayor, **Councillors** and **Fiona Weigall**, CEO, East Gippsland Shire Council

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this building stands – the Gunaikurnai people – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

For many years, since there have been Governors of Victoria (which is since 1851), Governors of Victoria have travelled across the State.

It has been a tradition that they visit the regions to speak with Victorians where they live, not just to wait until they find their way to Government House.

One of the early examples of such a visit occurred 140 years ago, when Governor Sir Henry Loch travelled through the Gippsland Lakes aboard the steamboat *Omeo*, enroute to Bairnsdale.

The boat had undergone a great overhaul in preparation for the journey, but when travelling through Lake Wellington and the Reeves River, it repeatedly hit snags – it lost a propellor shaft on each occasion – and they limped their way along.

They remarked upon the 'beautiful scenery' – which they had plenty of time to observe – viewed from the Mitchell River.

In the end, it took a full day of travel for them to get from Kilmany Park in Sale to reach the wharf at Bairnsdale.

It wasn't that difficult this time.

But while we get here faster, the purpose of the visit is the same.

It is a privilege of this role that you get the opportunity to talk with people across the State and – if I may use a colloquialism – to 'sticky beak' into all sorts of community organisations, into our educational institutions, our health organisations, and into our businesses and the people who are nurturing them and running them.

You get a sense of the nature of the economy and the society in a particular region, and you get some sense, from talking to people, of how they feel about how it's going, what they're doing and their aspirations.

Of course, people tell you about challenges they might have or policies they think could be looked at – but the great thing about being Governor is that they know that they're talking to you to give you the whole picture.

And so they also tell you all the things they're proud of, and all the area where they are innovating.

It's a privileged position because you get to hear the great things that people are doing and that's indeed what I've seen here.

In the relatively short time I've been Governor, I've been able to go into businesses – they're often family businesses, not small but medium sized – and they're an exciting example of

innovation, or the way the economy is transitioning. or how people are thinking about new ways to do things.

I've seen interesting and exciting transitions underway here in East Gippsland, and in the days before in Wellington Shire.

Together you form a very big and significant region that works together and talks to one another.

I had examples of this today talking to Food and Fibre Gippsland and hearing about the things they're doing in dry land farm experimentation.

I continue further about the great stories I have heard, but they are examples of what is being achieved and what is necessary in order to keep fuelling that achievement.

We also need those great supporting services, we need great education, we need great health services and even though all of us can think of ways that they can be better, the truth is that in Australia, we're lucky.

I often say to people, if you get sick overseas, get on a plane and come back.

And there's almost nowhere in the world that you wouldn't get on a plane and come back and be better off here.

And similarly, our education holds its own across the world.

We can always do better, but we're sitting on great foundations and we've got great people who are shaping our futures.

That's what I see, and it's truly inspiring.

We all have challenges, and we all know about the variations in circumstance that people find themselves in, but I see communities that support people.

Often, I feel that when people from the city look out to the regions, they hear about its great resilience in the face of challenges after flood, fire, drought.

But it's not the story you see when you're here – they happen and people rise to deal with them.

But the story is what people are achieving here day after day, outside those circumstances.

You shouldn't be turning your eyes only at the moment that they're overcoming the disaster.

It's built on significant volunteer activity and engagement, and that is really heartening to see.

That's what makes communities special, and that's what I see in the people I talked to on this visit to Gippsland.

I have a story here about Mina Armstrong, which I'm sure many of you know, who did great things here and who gave back to the place she came to.

In Australia, for so many of us – because over 50 per cent of the population either migrated here in their lifetimes or their parents did – lots of people came to this place new, and they give back, just as the ones who were here longer give back.

She founded a local Women's Group, and, after the sad death of her husband, founded a scholarship in partnership with East Gippsland TAFE that provides greater educational opportunities.

And she donated land as part of fundraising efforts to establish the oncology and dialysis unit here in Bairnsdale.

These are the foundations on which we build all the great other achievements in the community.

The basis of it is community spirit that says, *"We can do that."*

It is truly inspiring when I travel around to see the great ideas and the great work that people do.

I see that what drives people and what they want for their community.

I get to then talk to government ministers, the public sector, and visiting delegations who are coming here either for trade or investment or to look at stronger ties with our State.

And there are truly brilliant stories to tell.

They're stories that I can tell you without a shade of feeling that I'm over-exaggerating.

They are world-class stories, built on strong communities.

Thank you to all of you. It has been a real privilege being here – we try to cram as much in as we can but it's never enough.

As Governor, I hope to get to most of our great State, but I'm trying to spend enough time to hear what people say about the great things they're doing, not just the things that might be giving them pause.

Because we do our greatest things when we think and reflect on what we've achieved, as opposed to what stopped us achieving it.

Thank you.