



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

INVESTITURE OF CLAIRE HIGGINS AS CHANCELLOR OF DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Thursday 5 February 2026

Acknowledgments

Claire Higgins, Chancellor, Deakin University

Carol Boyer-Spooner, Deputy Chancellor,

Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor and President,

John Stanhope AO, Former Chancellor

and **Council Members**, Deakin University

Mayors of Local Government Councils

University staff

Distinguished guests

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

And I would also like to thank Corrina Eccles for her warm welcome.

Today we mark the beginning of a new chapter for Deakin University.

Not far from where we meet today is the place where that story began.

On a slab of concrete at the University's Waurin Ponds campus is where my predecessor – Governor Sir Henry Winneke – unveiled a plaque on 11 May 1978 to mark the official opening of the University.

Sir Henry also invested the University's first Chancellor, Peter Thwaites.

In his address on that day, Sir Henry described the moment as “an historic occasion both for Geelong and the State of Victoria.”

That much was evident.

Deakin was our State’s fourth university, and the first to have a dedicated regional focus.

Yet the moment did not come easily, nor did it arrive quickly.

The University’s establishment was the result of many years of advocacy and inquiries, tracing back to the Geelong University Committee in the 1950s.

Just over half a century ago, in 1974, legislation was passed to create the University, and the following year Waurn Ponds was selected as the site for its campus.

By 1978, as Sir Henry told the crowd gathered at the ceremony, Deakin University was “at last a reality.”

The significance of the moment was clear.

But what was unclear, at least at the time, was the extraordinary growth that would proceed in the decades to come.

Today we see the fruits from those seeds sown half a century ago.

Deakin University’s physical presence has greatly expanded – not only here in Geelong with this impressive waterfront campus, but in Burwood and Warrnambool too.

It reaches overseas, with campuses in Gujarat, India, and most recently Bandung, West Java, Indonesia – which I had the chance to visit late last year.

Deakin now educates over 60,000 students, and has a network of around 350,000 alumni stretching across the world.

All that began right here in Geelong.

So, it is perhaps fitting that the person to lead this institution into its next chapter is someone deeply familiar with this place.

Claire Higgins is a long-time resident of the Bellarine Peninsula.

She is acutely aware of the importance of supporting the needs of, and providing opportunities for, our regional communities.

Her vast professional experience is almost as broad as the University's curriculum – stretching from healthcare to finance, from manufacturing to property, all the way to emergency services and critical infrastructure.

Yet as she takes on this new, very different role, she will rely upon the same values that have served her well to this point:

A curiosity of mind, a willingness to exchange ideas, and a desire to understand and care deeply for those around her.

Claire Higgins has spoken of her role as a leader as encouraging people to try, set aspirations and celebrate achievements.

There is no better place to strive for these goals, and to reach so many people, than at an institution such as Deakin University.

Each new year brings in new students with visions and hopes, just as it brings the chance to celebrate the accomplishments of those who have realised this significant part of their path to their future.

Education gives to us all endless possibilities, and the immense privilege that is the quest to better understand and therefore contribute to the world we live in.

No one can foresee what the next five decades will hold for our world, this institution, nor for the students who learn within it.

But there is no doubt those guiding principles of understanding and stewardship will shape the Chancellor's tenure, allowing her to provide governance to this proud University into its next chapter – whatever that may hold.

It is now my great pleasure to formally commence the investiture of Claire Higgins as the seventh Chancellor of Deakin University.

Thank you.