



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

CIVIC RECEPTION COLAC OTWAY SHIRE

Tuesday 24 March 2026

Acknowledgments

Councillor Jason Schram, Mayor, **Councillors** and **Andrew Tenni**, Chief Executive Officer,
Colac Otway Shire Council

Richard Riordan MP, Member for Polwarth

Tim Wiebusch ESM, Emergency Management Commissioner

Distinguished guests

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

Thank you, Caleb, for your warm welcome.

It's a pleasure to join you all here tonight.

In just over a month's time, Government House will welcome hundreds of outstanding Victorians to recognise their contributions in the Order of Australia.

Among them will be several residents from this Shire.

There is Phillip Johnson, who is being recognised for his service to the community through a range of roles – including as a former President of Probus Club of Colac Otway and the Lions Club of Colac.

There is Maryjane Crabtree, acknowledged for her significant service to the legal profession, to community health, and to sport.

And there is Malcolm Gardiner – no relation, I promise – who will be celebrated for his service to environmental conservation, and to the community.

Though we host these ceremonies every year, it is always striking to see the depth of representation from regional Victoria.

From this Shire alone, with a comparatively small population, there are three awards to local residents in just one honours list.

It is worth considering why that is the case.

While we might think it is because regional Victorians are particularly good at nominating their peers, I think it goes much deeper than that.

It speaks to the strength of community spirit that thrives in places like this.

In early May, when these recipients walk along the red carpet in the State Ballroom to be invested, their service will be summarised in just a few words.

Yet what that citation represents means so much more.

It may represent many decades of giving one's time, often wearing many different hats at different organisations, sometimes across a variety of different sectors.

I'm conscious not all such stories of service are recognised in the same way.

And if a Governor only stayed at Government House, they would see only a small snapshot of these contributions.

Therefore, on these regional visits, I get the opportunity to speak to community members, like yourselves, and hear firsthand the full breadth of what you are doing.

If it holds true that regional Victorians are particularly good at giving back to their communities, we might then ask what drives this impulse.

As you would all know much more than I, living in a rural or regional area comes with its own unique challenges.

The barriers of distance can create challenges for service delivery.

Though often home to abundant resources, regional economies can be vulnerable to shifts in market trends.

And we have seen recently the devastating impacts of natural disasters – a threat more persistent in places such as this.

Yet despite these challenges, the spirit of regional communities shines through:

We see people advocating for equitable services or pioneering local solutions.

We see businesses innovating to adapt and produce high-quality goods.

And, in the wake of emergencies, we see immense generosity as people find ways to support one another.

These are all strengths I have witnessed during my visit so far.

Those living in regional communities find the reasons that sustain the strength of their people's contributions.

It is true we cannot rely on this alone to be the answer to such challenges.

However, they are important foundations – and it is helpful for me to hear these stories and see this work firsthand.

My experiences on these visits help inform my own stories – the ones I tell senior government officials or trade delegations visiting from overseas – about all that is going on here.

And so, on that note, I'd like to thank the Council for warmly hosting me on my visit, and I look forward to speaking with more of you tonight.

Thank you.