



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Introductory remarks

Mr Andrew Metcalfe
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Annual Address on Immigration and Citizenship
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Thank you Peter for such a lovely introduction. It's my pleasure to make some introductory comments, and we'll get to Professor Chubb soon.

Can I firstly and very sincerely acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today—their wisdom, enduring history and culture. I pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

Good evening everyone and welcome to the inaugural Annual Address on Immigration and Citizenship. This is, for all of us, quite an historic occasion, the first of many opportunities, we hope, over the years, for eminent speakers to explore aspects of the contributions that immigration and citizenship have made and will make to our nation. There are many distinguished people here tonight, and I plan to use these introductory remarks to introduce several of them and to highlight their contribution to this great theme of our history, and this great theme of our future.

Firstly, it's my great pleasure to acknowledge our minister, Senator Chris Evans and our parliamentary secretary, Laurie Ferguson MP and other members of parliament present here tonight. Thank you so much for coming.

Can I also acknowledge former ministers in the portfolio, the Hon Chris Hurford, and past departmental secretaries, John Menadue and Helen Williams.

May I warmly welcome the High Commissioner of India, Her Excellency Sujatha Singh. Welcome Sujatha, thank you for joining us, as well as other colleagues from the diplomatic corps. The Irish ambassador was certainly invited given a third of Australians have Irish blood in their veins, but it is St Patrick's Day and he's elsewhere I'm afraid.

And a very warm welcome to all other officers of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, both present and our many former officers, who are here tonight. Some of you are here with your spouses and partners, and we're delighted that you could join us.

Much of the department's senior leadership is here tonight. We now lead a department that provides services to the government, to the Australian community and to clients all around the world. We have more than 6000 staff employed here in Australia and about 1000 Australia-based and locally engaged employees overseas. A department that is now a vital part of Australia's economic, security and social infrastructure. A department strongly focused on continuing to improve our policy capabilities, our client services and operational integrity, as well as our own business services.

Celebrating 65 years of nation building in 2010

people our business

We also have many of our 2010 graduate recruits here tonight. Australians born in our cities and towns across the country such as Esperance, Bairnsdale and Crookwell; and overseas in places such as Chandigarh in India and Shanghai in China. Graduates in law, information technology, international business and social work, many of whom speak a second language including Mandarin, Hindi, Portuguese and Arabic.

You, along with our many other colleagues across the organisation, are the future of this department. I hope tonight's occasion helps you link your future with our past.

I would particularly like to thank Jenny Anderson for welcoming us all to the museum and to Old Parliament House, as well as for her support and the assistance of her staff in making tonight's event occur. Can I also thank those staff of the department's National Communications Branch and of the Australian National University who have worked so hard to make tonight's event possible. A special thank you to James Groves, who is standing at the back of the room, who has worked with me on this project since its initial conception last year. James is soon leaving the department for other opportunities, very much at his own choosing, not of my choosing. James I'd like to thank you very very much for all you've done tonight.

Ladies and Gentlemen

A special guest here tonight is Dr Mary-Elizabeth Calwell, who Jenny mentioned before, who is of course the daughter of the first minister of the portfolio, the Honourable Arthur Calwell. A very warm welcome to you, Dr Calwell, from everyone here this evening. It has been a great pleasure for me to meet you this afternoon and hear more about your father, many of us had heard about the famous parliamentarian. But to hear from the daughter about the man was something that I found very very special.

Arthur Calwell of course stood many times in this very place to speak about matters of immigration and citizenship, including on 2 August 1945 when he introduced the Chifley Government's White Paper on Immigration and said:

'If Australians have learned one lesson from the Pacific war now moving to a successful conclusion, it is surely that we cannot continue to hold our island continent for ourselves and our descendants unless we greatly increase our numbers.'

And then in September 1948, Arthur Calwell introduced in this chamber the Nationality and Citizenship Bill which established the modern concept of Australian citizenship—a visionary concept of equal status for all Australians, whether born here or migrated here and chosen to become an Australian. We celebrated 60 years of Australian citizenship last year, 2009.

Many subsequent debates followed in this chamber and elsewhere in this parliament, including on the Migration Bill in 1958 introduced to parliament by then minister Downer and which, after its enactment, became the ultimate work of reference for many of the officers here tonight.

I also especially welcome Dr Rowan and Mrs Sally Sawers. Rowan is the grandson of the first permanent head of the department, Sir Tasman Heyes. Sir Tasman's daughter, Mrs Peggy Sawers and her husband Donald had planned join us tonight but she is unfortunately not able to travel from Melbourne. We look forward to seeing her on some future occasion, and Rowan and Sally I'd like to thank you so much for representing the family at this occasion, and I know you will pass on our best wishes to your mother.

As the first permanent head, Sir Tasman is a figure who sometimes towers over those who followed in his footsteps. He undertook this most significant role from 1946 to 1961—the longest serving secretary of this department. I was intrigued to learn that Sir Tasman—the

first permanent departmental secretary and I, the fourteenth, do have one thing in common. Apparently, wherever he was in the world, he used to have the Fitzroy football results telegraphed to him. I shared his obsession with Fitzroy until their sad demise some years ago, but can happily combine my love of the Fitzroy football team with my Queensland origins by now supporting the Brisbane Lions who have won a few premierships! Unlike, Minister, some other teams.

Can I also especially welcome Justice Dyson Heydon, Mrs Pamela Crichton and Mrs Julia Hoffmann and other family and friends associated with Sir Peter Heydon, the second permanent head of the department from 1961 until his death at a relatively young age in 1971. Between them, Sir Tasman and Sir Peter dominated the implementation and administration of the migration architecture which sustained the economic and social transformation of our nation following the Second World War, including the ending of the White Australia policy, 40 years or so ago.

They were exemplars of the great traditions of the Australian Public Service, and built this great department which I am proud to lead today. I know there are retired officers here tonight who will have their own personal memories of Sir Tasman and Sir Peter in their heyday. I also know there are family members of later departmental secretaries, and in the years ahead we aim to explore through this lecture the contribution made by officers of the department to this great theme of Australian history.

Peter Heydon wrote in 1965 about the work of the department and recognised both the qualities required of immigration officers and the extraordinary impact of our work, saying:

‘It is basic to the approach of a good immigration officer that he [or she] in dealing with human beings in matters that vitally concern them either for a substantial period of time or for their whole lives’.¹

These words are as true today as they were 45 years ago, and indeed foreshadow by four decades the motto of the department adopted in 2005, ‘people our business’.

I look forward very much to Justice Heydon’s remarks and reflections on his father which close the formal part of this evening’s events.

And of course I warmly welcome our principal speaker, Professor Ian Chubb, the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University, and also the members of the ANU community who are partnering with the department in convening this annual address.

Ladies and gentlemen

The Department of Immigration was established on 13 July 1945 and the ANU was founded the following year. It should only have been expected that at some stage we would jointly organise an event of this nature, but we avoided an unseemly rush in doing so—so 65 years later here we are!

I especially thank Professor Chubb for recognising the value of partnering with the department in convening this address and for honouring us by agreeing to be the inaugural speaker.

As we celebrate the 65th anniversary of the establishment of the department this year, we can reflect on the work we have undertaken to facilitate more than seven million migrants coming to Australia and the conferral of citizenship upon four million people.

¹ p.5, PR Heydon, ‘Cooperative administration in migration’, Vol.24 No.1, March 1965, Public Administration, Sydney, Australia

As a direct result of this work, Australia is now a nation in which nearly one in two people was either born overseas or has a parent who was born overseas.

This places us among the most culturally diverse nations in the world. A nation in which we can take pride in the knowledge that people of all cultures, ancestries and religions can hope to live peacefully, safely and harmoniously—everyone from the Indigenous peoples with their proud history of living sustainably on this land and people who migrated or whose forebears migrated sometime during the past 222 years.

While there has generally been broad and bipartisan support for migration policy, the history of migration has been controversial at times. Often, competing views and interests have to be carefully weighed. Policy, legal, operational and individual needs have to be considered. There has been significant public interest and discussion on immigration and citizenship matters in the parliament and the community since the earliest days of my department, and indeed long before. Many issues have been strongly argued in the parliament, the courts, the media, academia and the court of public opinion.

I, for one, see this sustained debate and discourse as a reflection of working through who we are as a people and a nation, and who we want to be. It also reflects the undeniable fact that Australia is a great and vibrant democracy.

In my view, any balanced assessment of the department's 65 year history will determine that it has been a major force in nation building, it has helped millions of people to forge new lives in our great country. But we also need to acknowledge that, sadly but perhaps inevitably, and despite all measures to prevent them, mistakes have occurred over the years. Some have had a profound impact on people's lives. We administer a complex area of public policy, and millions of clients are affected by the department and the decisions we make—overwhelmingly positively. But sometimes we get things wrong. As a department we have a clear value placed on the fact that if a mistake is made it must be identified: it must be fixed.

We have strong values and expectations that we must respect our clients, that we must be fair and reasonable in our decision-making, and that we must be open to ideas, advice and scrutiny. In that regard can I acknowledge the presence here tonight of the outgoing Commonwealth and Immigration Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan, and his deputy Dr Vivienne Thom, whose office plays such an important role in ensuring our accountability, and who, personally, have helped me greatly to advance the department's reform program in recent years. Thank you John and Vivienne, for your leadership and support.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In my view our migration history is one of the great stories of the building of the Australian nation.

It is a story which needs to be explored in many ways, as we are doing through this annual address.

I am delighted to announce tonight that Mr Hieu Van Le, the Lieutenant Governor of South Australia and Chairman of the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission has agreed to provide the second immigration and citizenship address, scheduled for the middle of 2011.

Mr Van Le was one of the first boat people to arrive in Australia from Vietnam, arriving as a refugee with his wife Lan in 1977.

From great hardship and adversity, they made a new and successful life in this country and have inspired many others through the appointment as Lieutenant Governor and in the conduct, the way in which he's undertaking his vice-regal role.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Professor Ian Chubb is a distinguished scholar and leader who needs very little introduction to this audience.

He was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University in January 2001, following a range of senior academic and government appointments.

I can do no better than to quote from the citation from Professor Chubb's award when he was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia, for 'service to higher education including research and development policy in the pursuit of advancing the national interest socially, economically, culturally and environmentally and to the facilitation of a knowledge-based global economy'.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please join with me in welcoming Professor Chubb to present the inaugural Annual Address on Immigration and Citizenship.