

ADDRESS BY  
HIS HONOUR MR TOM PAULING AO QC  
**ADMINISTRATOR OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
**OPENING OF DESERT KNOWLEDGE SYMPOSIUM**  
Alice Springs Convention Centre, Alice Springs  
4 November 2008

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I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Desert Knowledge Precinct, and Alice Springs, and the Native Title Holders for the area, Lhere Artpe Aboriginal Corporation.

And I would like to welcome local, interstate and international attendees; visitors, business representatives and the distinguished keynote speakers at this Symposium.

It is exciting as Administrator of the Northern Territory, and as Patron of the Alice Springs Desert Leadership Program, to witness highly progressive partnerships in action across The Territory, the nation, and beyond.

This particular Desert Knowledge Australia, Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre and Desert Peoples Centre collaboration is an excellent example. It is good to see Harold Furber again, I was fond of his Mum.

Partnerships are a key foundation, as is innovation. Desert Knowledge Australia's role in building national cross-desert networks is demonstrating real value. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are working together and learning from each other in new ways, avoiding duplication of effort and sharing knowledge.

Deserts are notorious in the lay person's mind for the negatives: the lack of rainfall, extremely high evaporation rates, and apparent absence of animal life, sparse vegetation and limited human occupation. As one of the earth's major types of ecosystems, however, all desert knowledge is fundamental to our future.

Exploration, mapping of mining and minerals, identification of flora and fauna as well as the socio economic structures, present opportunities which can be unexpected in their extent. Indeed the definition of "knowledge" noted on the Princeton "wordnet" website appraises its importance as: *the psychological result of perception and learning and reasoning.*

Thanks to the work being achieved by Desert Knowledge Australia and its partners, the psychological result translates to practical outcomes. I recently learnt some examples when Keith Castle, Business Development Manager of the Desert Peoples Centre, briefed me about the innovative methods to link training to livelihoods.

I have a light hearted personal example where a little bit of local desert knowledge went a long way ...

In the late nineties I was involved in a land claim in the southwest corner of the Simpson Desert. Our party was based at the famous Birdsville Hotel. Our only way in and out of the desert was by helicopter as it was raining upcountry and Eyre Creek was flooded.

An old timer reminisced *last time Eyre Creek flooded, not long after the waters arrived the creek was full of yabbies*. So while my colleagues and I were working in the desert, the Birdsville Hotel organised some yabbie traps and before long there were two 44 gallon drums full of yabbies.

That afternoon, when we returned, the chef got going with garlic butter and a hot plate – yummo! But he gave up after the first drum. I promptly complained to the hotelier and equally promptly was passed a sharp knife and chef's hat – understandably a happy chef was more important in the outback than a replete customer.

In May this year, the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre issued a Media Release outlining the huge water savings resulting from telemetry – radio waves which transmit information electronically and therefore provide an ability to monitor what goes on in remote parts of an extensive grazing property.

Within the past few weeks I have visited Napperby Station, northwest of Alice Springs. Here, Roy and Janet Chisholm gave a fascinating account of the new techniques now in use that have enabled him even when abroad at a conference to check his watering points from as far afield as Rio de Janeiro! This month it will be his party trick in Uruguay.

Napperby's comprehensive telemetry system covers fourteen water points and is monitoring water levels, operating twelve solar pumps and nutrient dose dispensers, three rain gauges and two still cameras.

The property is also working with cutting edge technologies such as walk-over-weighing, and automatic drafting.

Just prior to visiting Napperby, I conducted an Investiture in Alice Springs. The recipient was Dr Ken Johnson who was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in the General Division. This was timely recognition of Ken's contribution to the establishment and management of Alice Springs Desert Park and, subsequently, his role as Chair of the Desert Knowledge Project Steering Committee and then tenure as Chief Executive Officer of the Desert Knowledge Australia statutory corporation.

Having this opportunity to renew my friendship with Ken and hear some of his fascinating history for myself was a pleasure. Even more so was to obtain his recipe for cooking feral doves which apparently trumps his earlier culinary triumph with feral cats!

I note that a local bush foods producer, Peter Yates, is currently experimenting with new flavours harvesting the desert caper berry. Perhaps we'll see a dish of two feral doves served at Christmas with desert capers as a condiment, with the addition of quandong preserve thanks to a ready supply of seeds deposited within emu droppings!

Desert Australia has immeasurable potential. Looking at your comprehensive program and thought-provoking themes for this third biennial Symposium, I can see that it will be as full of activity as the Melbourne Cup and I hope that those of you who get to Pioneer Park today enjoy a little success. For my part I like *Profound Beauty* – she might get Glen Boss back on the winning trail. However, when John Huigen joined my table for the Alice Springs Cup, we couldn't pick a winner for love or money!

Finally, spare a thought for someone who is also in the racing game - combined with the challenge of the deserts.

Katherine obstetrician, Paul Liebenberg, has just completed the third race in the Four Deserts series of seven-day, 250 kilometre, footraces across four of the world's most extreme deserts: Atacama, Gobi, Sahara and finally, at the end of November, the stark contrast

of Antarctica. If he can complete all four, he may be the first to do so and the experiences of this Northern Territory-based doctor will surely also contribute to desert knowledge.

Thank you for being here. I am very happy and encouraged to give support to the three branches of this desert tree and wish I had more time to engage with you.

Enjoy this event.