

Official Opening, Local Government Managers Australia National Congress
SPEECH by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC
Administrator of the Northern Territory
Darwin Convention Centre – 25 May 2009

As Administrator of the Northern Territory, I would like to welcome you to this, the first Local Government Managers National Congress to be held in Darwin. A choice of venue that perfectly compliments your theme *Creating our future*, as I firmly believe the future of the Northern Territory is positive and proactive.

Earlier this month, I was walking through Darwin city relishing the crowds of excited Arafura Games participants. What makes this sporting occasion unique is the fact that events for athletes with and without a disability are integrated into the one competition here, involving more than thirty different countries and 3,000 participants. International athletes and officials were making the most of this outstanding opportunity to experience an international event.

It was good to see the sportsmen and women enjoying the thriving Top End environment. They found our multicultural city of some 100,000 people welcoming and organised and I know that the friendly reception they received was much appreciated. I was extremely proud of our community which has developed over the past 140 years.

There have been major milestones since the city's foundation: Construction of the Overland Telegraph which made communication between Australia and the rest of the world possible in hours rather than weeks. As the advent of email was for our generation, the telegraph must have been for the 19th century. The first overland pole was planted in September 1870 by Harriet Douglas, daughter of my predecessor in Government House – the second Government Resident, Captain William Douglas.

Those surveying and building the telegraph line discovered gold and towns prospered and waned in the aftermath of the Territory gold rush. Mounted police arrived from South Australia and the first gaol was built, the first trading companies were established, three banks arrived - the Town and Country, the Commercial and the ES and A (colloquially known as the Tin Bank). And of course there was a local newspaper – probably just as fixated about crocodiles

as the NT News is today. Indeed, the first recorded fatality in Darwin was due to the dreaded alligator, as they were then known.

In the hinterland, pastoral leases commenced in 1872, the first live cattle were exported to Asia and the livestock industry which is such an integral part of the modern-day Northern Territory was born. And far from the dust of the outback, the lush greenery of the Botanical Gardens was planted by Maurice Holtze who had previously worked at the St Petersburg Imperial Gardens before fleeing Russia.

A narrow gauge railway ran from Darwin and Pine Creek and then the former North Australia Railway linked Darwin with Birdum five hundred kilometres south. We finally progressed from the days of loading ships from a wooden railway jetty over there (*indicate*) to the long awaited opening of the 3,000 kilometre Darwin to Adelaide rail service which links directly to the state of the art East Arm port facilities.

When everything from churches to pubs and most necessities of late 19th century living had been established, then the 1897 cyclone hit. Darwin continued to develop in periodic leaps and bounds but Mother Nature inflicted blows of such strength, in 1917, 1937 and 1974 that the community had to repeatedly demonstrate a breed of resilience and fortitude that overcame the worst the tropical climate could inflict. And, in 1942, also combat the worst that manmade terror could inflict during the bombing of Darwin.

On the other side of the world, in the late 1980s, I had the opportunity to compare our community with a prosperous society dating back to Roman times. A thriving city of frescoes and mosaics, gardens and sculptures. It possessed all the ingredients for thriving community life: a centre or forum, the *basilica* for legal and business matters, the *macellum* or marketplace and an assortment of temples. I even found the mosaic *cave canum* – meaning “beware of the dog”!

This city boasted an innovative water distribution system which I can't see being accepted as a solution for those of you in drought stricken regions: The stream was divided into three channels. One fed the public fountains, a second carried water to the public baths while the third stream took water to the villas

of the most affluent citizens. In times of drought the rich were the first who would lose their water supply, the public baths were the second to go dry. In extreme cases of drought, water was provided only to the public fountains.

I am of course referring to Pompeii, a Roman city struck by two natural disasters. The first was a devastating earthquake in AD 62. This presented its inhabitants with a challenge and an opportunity to rebuild in a manner and on a scale that they may never have undertaken if disaster had not struck – reminiscent of Darwin following Cyclone Tracy.

However, as we all know, the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79 destroyed Pompeii once and for all. This dismayed the Romans who were passionate about observing the 'portents' and predicting the future. They had been proud of their booming economy, the investment potential of their villas and the vibrant trade of the Mediterranean.

There is a lesson for us all. Local government, however competent, cannot accurately read the future. However, as your American guests may be aware, the contemporary Pompeii Forum Project study seeks *to interpret the developments at Pompeii in the broader context of urban history and to identify at Pompeii recurring patterns of urban evolution that can be applied to contemporary issues in American urbanism.*

As you look forward and consider your Local Government message this week – *Creating our future, messages with solutions* – I sincerely hope that you will balance questions of infrastructure, economics and demographics with an understanding of the importance of country and culture, caring and all the nebulous aspects that engender a sense of soul, of spirit, into a community.

I concede that attempts to create a utopian society only reflect one of the definitions of the word utopia - *an impractical scheme for social improvement.* But innovation is critical for local government, as is a positive vision of what should happen in the future instead of close minded opposition to change because of fear of the unknown or the weight of the tasks that need to be accomplished.

These tasks on behalf of our citizens are considerable, especially as the new larger shires both here and in Queensland, work to ensure the delivery of better services in the bush.

Cooperation, informed design, realistic infrastructure planning and proper respect for exchange of ideas - this is the message I would nominate for those that manage the structure of local government, leading our community forward.