

Official Opening of the Tertiary Education Management Conference
SPEECH by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC
Administrator of the Northern Territory
Darwin Convention Centre – 14 September 2009

As Administrator of the Northern Territory, I would like to welcome you today and I acknowledge the Larrakia people and their ancestors, traditional owners of the land.

I note that in 1991, the last time your Conference was held in Darwin, the theme was *Evolution or Extinction*. It would have been an ideal theme for this occasion as we are in the midst of commemorations for the 150th Anniversary of Charles Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* and also Darwin's birthday 200 years ago, in February 1809. Indeed, only last week we celebrated the fact that 170 years ago *HMS Beagle* lay at anchor outside this harbour and a whaleboat under the command of Lieutenant John Lort Stokes sailed in. The body of water made a favourable impression and he and his Commander, John Clements Wickham, named "Darwin Harbour" after their shipmate on the second voyage of the Beagle.

Your theme in 2009, "Sustainability in Higher Education", is also pertinent for this city and for the Northern Territory. Because, despite the tyranny of distance and the ebb and flow of early history linked with the legends of some rather disreputable, hard living pioneers, this region has displayed a measure of sustainability to date. I refer to the World Commission on Environment and Development's definition as *forms of progress that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs*.

Pastoral leases in the Northern Territory commenced in 1872 and our rural industries are fast adapting to modern-day technologies. Having survived the serious business of brucellosis eradication, care for the environment is a priority and the next generation are pursuing new techniques whether at rural colleges or at home on the land. An impressive example is Bonalbo Station, which I have just visited. There, Fiona McBain has implemented a plan that involved erecting over fifty kilometres of electric fencing, new tanks and watering troughs. With new infrastructure and management systems, they are

now able to rest 90% of their grazing land at the beginning of the growing season to allow maximum benefit to the environment. There is an increase in biodiversity of both plants and animals, a decrease in rainfall runoff, healing of eroded areas, as well as a large increase in average annual stocking rate.

Then we have the Centre for Remote Health and the Northern Territory Clinical School in partnership with Flinders University and James Cook University contributing to improved health outcomes for remote communities. Great efforts have been made, since the first students commenced in 1998, to ensure new generations of doctors are introduced to the opportunities in the north.

There are, however, many huge issues facing us here that reflect the new challenges worldwide. Tomorrow's students will be compelled to find solutions for problems that today we may not fully comprehend. Those attending our tertiary institutions have to be given leadership, the tools for innovation and new initiatives. Managers and lecturers alike must see their role as fundamental to the future. Learning has to be exciting, a quest for knowledge is never mundane and our tertiary institutions must pursue success.

Employers are also demanding skilled labour of the right type, whether accredited or "on-the-job". They want a quality workforce. The British education expert, Sir Ken Robinson, recently told the 7.30 Report that: *it is an economic imperative in a world where imagination and innovation are crucial to the future, that education becomes more diverse, more creative. He argues that education systems around the world are too narrow, backward looking and too often ignore the talents of the students.*

Which leads me to mention the Chancellor of Liverpool John Moores University. Brian May could well have been one of those students we often hear before we see on campus, producing a cacophony behind the Arts Faculty. But this Brian May is the guitarist with rock band Queen and he put his academic career on hold for thirty years before achieving a doctorate in astrophysics, co-writing a book with Sir Patrick Moore and even having an asteroid named after him. His comment is: *dream, plan, achieve - such simple words but they summarise perfectly the educational experience that LJMU*

provides, changing people's lives and helping individuals to reach their goals and realise their dreams."

Tertiary education systems offer vital partnerships – with students, with communities and through regional links. But for those partnerships to work well there has to be communication and an understanding of emerging issues such as globalisation, new fields of resource exploration, dramatic improvements in information technology. E-learning is an obvious trend with benefits for those living at considerable distance from university or college.

In some cases we find that it is our primary school students who are leading by example from the bottom up. After all, many of us find ourselves having to “phone a friend”, preferably under the age of fifteen, when faced with the latest technology. Young students are often comfortable with the very innovations that institutions find a barrier to progress.

I venture to say that students of all ages are learning the essence of sustainability and by the time they reach tertiary education, their expectations are far advanced compared to their predecessors. One of our local primary schools, Manunda Terrace, summed it up thus: *Sustainability is not a short term thing – it takes a long time. It needs to be embedded in action and curriculum plans.* Another at Alawa not only recently learnt about the live cattle industry but also worked with leading chef and author, Stephanie Alexander, in her Kitchen Garden Foundation project.

Earlier this year, I sent a letter of congratulations to one of the teachers at Humpty Doo Primary School for winning the CSIRO Greenhouse 2009 prize. Jenni Webber’s response to my letter is worth sharing as it underlines the need for all in education, at whatever level, to be Provoking, Proactive and Positive: *As a long term resident in the rural area, I have been teaching out here since 2001. I believe that it is through our children that we can make the changes necessary to value and protect our environment.... Behind my desk I have the following quote “In the end, we will only conserve what we love. We will only love what we understand. We will only understand what we are taught” - Baba Dioum (the Senegalese ecologist).*

I would like to leave you with a comment made by Chris Sarra, Executive Director of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute: *being in a profession where we can truly play our part in weaving the fabric for a positive and prolific Australian future is something we must never take for granted.*

I now declare the 2009 Tertiary Education Management Conference officially open and wish you well with your deliberations – I hope that there will be an imaginative, vigorous and flexible approach to your agenda.