

ADDRESS TO BASTILLE DAY COMMEMORATION

Hon. Don Harwin MLC, President of the NSW Legislative Council, Patron - Friends of Laperouse Museum

La Perouse Monument and Museum, Saturday, July 14, 2012

Madame Deputy Consul-General,

Mr Mayor,

Mr Charles Abela, Vice President and all of the other Friends of the Laperouse Museum present,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

We do three things here today.

First, as people with blood ties and others with a love of France, we pay our respects to a nation we love on the French national Day – popularly known here and elsewhere as Bastille Day.

As the stirring words of *La Marseillaise* celebrates, this is the day when France transitioned from feudalism to modernity.

As the proud great-grandson of a 16 year old young Frenchwoman, Marguerite Celestine Beaucaine, who left her village near Reims. Who came to Sydney speaking almost no English.

I pay tribute to the nation which gave birth to her, the nation which embodies so much that we all admire.

Second, as Australians, today it is an opportunity to remember the integral role the French played in European exploration and settlement of our nation.

At every turn, we see not just the British but the French as well at a time both nations were technically at war.

After all:

- Cook's voyage followed that of Baron Louis Antoine de Bougainville, who almost reached Australia but turned back at the Great Barrier Reef ;
- Jean Francois Laperouse's voyage, although principally a scientific mission, nevertheless had explicit instructions from the government of Louis XVI to observe British activities. After all, as his Government's dispatch observed: "Australia was not a prize that could be lost by default;"

- Bruny-d'Entrecasteaux's unsuccessful mission to find Laperouse, instead discovered Van Diemen's Land was in fact an island, before Bass and Flinders expedition; and
- Lt John Shortland, captain of a First Fleet vessel, carried back to Europe Laperouse's final existing section of his journal and the letters of the crews of the Astrolabe and the Bussoulet, giving us the few known details of Laperouse's final voyage.

We must all commit ourselves today to continuing the efforts to maintain the museum which marks the place of the French nation in our history and in particular, the period from 23 January to 10 March 1788 when the two French ships were in this place before they left to meet their fate, shipwrecked in a tropical cyclone on the reefs off Vanikoro, in the Solomon islands.

Fortunately we know a good deal about the voyage through the documents saved by Shortland, although so many valuable plant, animal and mineral specimens perished with the ships.

It is a story familiar to many here today.

Third and finally, on this occasion we are all reminded of the courage and sacrifice of those who have served in French and Australian forces and I pay tribute to those ex-servicemen present.

If anything, as we approach the 100th anniversary of the tragic battles on the Western Front during the Great War, the ties between our two countries can only grow in the next few years.

So many Australians have a personal connection to these events. A former Prime Minister, John Howard, had a father and a grandfather that served on the Western Front.

My own grandfather served at the battles of Pozieres and Bullecourt.

330,000 Australian troops fought on the Western Front. Of those:

- Nearly 160,000 were wounded
- Nearly 60,000 were killed – the highest casualty rate for any British Commonwealth force , and
- About 4,500 were taken prisoners-of-war.

Australia's contribution was extraordinary in the defence of France and of our freedoms and liberty.

It is a privilege to be here and to mark the unshakeable and enduring bonds between our two countries.

La Fete Nationale (Bastille Day)

Saturday 14 July, 10.30am

Laperouse Monument

MAYOR'S SPEECH

- Good morning everyone.
- Firstly, I would like to show my respect and acknowledge the Bidjigal [bid-jee-gal] people, who are the traditional custodians of this land where we are meeting today, and pay my respects to the elders both past and present.
- I'm delighted, as Mayor of Randwick City and Patron of the Friends of Laperouse Museum to be here with you today to celebrate La Fete Nationale (Bastille Day), the most significant national day on the French calendar – both in France, and for French speaking communities across the globe.
- I would particularly like to acknowledge:
 - My fellow councillors, the Hon Don Harwin;

- Mr Charles Abela, Vice-President of the Friends of the Laperouse Museum; and of course
 - The many dedicated volunteers, without whom the Museum simply would not survive.
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- Bastille Day, France's National Day, commemorates the first anniversary in 1789 of the storming of the Bastille, the fortress-like prison in Paris that had a reputation for incarcerating political prisoners, and other undesirables whose writings or activities offended the king.
 - The storming of the Bastille was seen as a powerful symbol of the uprising of the modern French nation, the victory of the new area over the old regime, and the conclusion of the French Revolution; it remains a day to for France to celebrate national unity.
 - A few short years before these dramatic events unfolded in Paris, Laperouse, commissioned by Louis XVI in 1785 to explore the Pacific and undertake a scientific and geographic expedition, landed very close by, at what we now know as Frenchmans Bay, forever linking this part of Sydney with the French, explaining our enduring bonds

with the French-speaking community in our City.

- Laperouse arrived here a mere three days after the British did. His crew camped here for six weeks, while Captain Arthur Phillip was busy establishing the fledgling British colony of NSW on the southern shore of Port Jackson.
- During their stay, Laperouse's crew took the time to visit the new settlement at Port Jackson, walking to get there, along what we know today as Frenchmans Road in Randwick.
- British lookouts stationed at the south head of Port Jackson watched Laperouse's expedition depart in March 1788; but Laperouse was never seen or heard from again, both his ships wrecked in the Solomon Islands sometime during April or May 1788.
- Here in Randwick City we are lucky to have a culturally diverse population, and we appreciate how much that diversity enriches us all.
- We are home to a thriving and flourishing French-speaking community. Between 2006 and 2011 the French-speaking community in Randwick City increased by some 230 people; meaning that close to 1500 people in our City

speak French at home as their native language.

- Randwick City is also one of the oldest council areas in NSW, and home to many significant locations that have helped shape Australia's history, and helped to maintain those strong links with the French.
- Within just a stone's throw from where we stand today are:
 - The landing place of Laperouse's ships, on the sandy shores of what we now know as Frenchmans Bay;
 - The grave of Pere Receveur – the Fransiscan priest and scientist aboard Laperouse's ship the L'Astrolabe; the first Catholic priest to die on mainland Australian soil;
 - And of course, here where we stand, the Laperouse Monument – constructed in 1828 to commemorate the great navigator Laperouse himself.
- And the iconic Laperouse Museum, which opened in 1988, and is located in the historic Cable Station on the spectacular northern headland of Botany Bay; such a fitting home for the many precious artefacts and relics that

so vividly bring to life the story of Laperouse's ill-fated voyage.

- As Mayor of this City, I am proud that we are home to a museum of this calibre that celebrates the history of Laperouse, but also the Indigenous stories of this area, as well as the environment and geography.
- Finally, I would like to pay tribute to both the tireless efforts of the volunteers of the Laperouse Museum – thank you; and the French-speaking communities of our City. It's an honour to be sharing these celebrations with you today.