

Hon Mark Speakman, Minister for Environment & Heritage, delivered at the Lapérouse Museum

I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of this land that we are meeting on today, and pay my respects to Gweagal, Bidjigal and Cadigal elders past and present.

Mr Olivier Le Van Xieu, French Deputy Consul-General, Mr Peter Hay, National Parks and Wildlife Service, les amis du musée Lapérouse, mesdames et messieurs :

1. I'm delighted tonight to be with the Friends of the Laperouse Museum, whom I understand are, to say the least, a very knowledgeable audience concerning this particular historical subject.
2. It's my pleasure to join you this evening to celebrate this significant site, and to pay tribute to the shared histories associated with this place.
3. Tonight, we'll recognise the achievements of the French navigator, Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de Lapérouse, and reflect upon

how this significant place reveals to us the big themes in the history of this land.

4. Before we begin, however, I'd like to say that I'm looking forward to seeing this wonderful local museum thrive, under the recently established partnership between Randwick City Council and the new La Perouse Museum and Headland Trust. I'm particularly interested to see the initiatives that will enhance public access and engagement with the diverse collection materials, and significant heritage items, in this area.
5. Here in La Perouse, there are four items on the State Heritage Register. One of those is designated as an Aboriginal Place as well. Each of these listings – Bare Island Fort, the Chinese Market Gardens, La Perouse Mission Church, and Kamay Botany Bay National Park – contributes to the shared historical narrative of this area.
6. *Bare Island Fort* is a nationally significant example of late nineteenth century coastal defence technology. Bare Island represents one of the more substantial and impressive fortifications constructed at the time.
7. Bare Island is also significant to members of the La Perouse Aboriginal community, with their long history of using the land, beaches and surrounding waters for food gathering, work and recreation. There've been many important relationships formed on the island and in this area, which are embedded in the social

landscape of this community.

8. The *Chinese Market Gardens* are a rare example of the continuous cultivation of food for the Sydney metropolitan area by Chinese market gardeners. Traditional cultivation practices have endured and much of the original form of the gardens has been retained. It's interesting to note that one of the key developments in this area during the French expedition of 1788 was the construction of a garden for fresh produce on La Perouse peninsula.
9. The *La Perouse Mission Church* is humble in appearance, with its small Gothic weatherboard construction from 1894. But it carries exceptional historic significance of Aboriginal resilience through European settlement. Members of the Aboriginal community of La Perouse have maintained an unbroken connection to the land for more than 7500 years, and I'm told that the missionary leaders are remembered with affection by the present community.
10. We're also meeting within the boundary of the *Kamay Botany Bay National Park*, which is a state heritage listed site of outstanding significance. This is a rare place that demonstrates the continuous history of occupation of the east coast of Australia. This place holds clear and valuable evidence of Indigenous occupation prior to European settlement, and the natural history of NSW.

11. It also contains many key sites protected by this listing, including Macquarie Watchtower, La Perouse Monument, Pere Receveur's grave, the Cable Station which is now the La Perouse Museum where we're gathered, the Coast Cemetery, fortifications including Henry Head Battery and Fort Banks, and the site of the Happy Valley settlement.
12. It's the place where the shared history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia began. It was the place where Lieutenant James Cook first stepped ashore, and therefore played a central role in the history of European arrival, the history of Indigenous resistance, and the history of dispossession and devastation through illness, land grants, conflict, cultivation and development.
13. The traditional Aboriginal custodians of this land and the current Aboriginal community have strong historical associations with Kamay Botany Bay National Park, as it's a place where Aboriginal people maintain links with their cultural heritage. The Dharawal Resting Place at Coast Hospital Cemetery located in the National Park is an important burial repatriation site and designated Aboriginal Place, which has high social and cultural significance for the Aboriginal community.
14. Kamay Botany Bay National Park is also significant for its historical association with important European explorers and scientists such

as Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander, Père Receveur, Joseph Lepaute Dagelet and, of course, Comte de Lapérouse.

15. And that brings me to this country's French connection.
16. Monuments to the 1788 French expedition maintain historical links for the French community here and abroad. There's Lapérouse monument, with its central obelisk topped by a spherical brass astrolabe. And there's the headstone and tomb of Père Receveur, priest and naturalist of the first French expedition. Both have long been significant to both local *and* visiting French people as sites of pilgrimage, reflection and celebration.
17. As such, these historic monuments have important symbolism to the state of NSW and demonstrate the longstanding links between Australia and France.
18. The story of Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de Lapérouse continues to fascinate and intrigue people on both sides of the earth. And why not? It's the story of a remarkable man, and a remarkable journey, and an intensely civil and humane encounter a world away from the troubles of home. It's a story of discovery, of skill and craft, and of historical chance which begs us, indeed, requires us, to ask the question: what could have been?
19. Many of you know that Jean-François de Galaup was born in August 1741, at the manor house of Gô near Albi, in the Province of Languedoc, France. In 1756, under the influence of Clement

Taffanel de la Jonquiere, a naval officer and relative, Lapérouse left Albi for Brest to begin his naval career. He was just 15 years old.

20. The prerequisite, however, for attending the Brest School of Midshipmen, was an annual income of £400. To address this requirement, the de Galaup family transferred a recently acquired property to Jean-François. This property was located in La Pérouse (in France), and it was from this point that he signed his name *Lapérouse*.
21. The naval career of Lapérouse was quite extraordinary. By 1780, at just 39 years of age, he had risen to the rank of Captain and, with France allied with insurgent colonialists during the American Revolutionary War, Lapérouse made his name commanding successful military campaigns in that conflict.
22. Lapérouse is particularly known for the battle against the British at Hudson Bay in 1782. There he demonstrated a progressive and humane approach to the casualties of war. Lapérouse made the decision to leave the survivors of the battle with enough arms and provisions to survive the upcoming winter.
23. In 1783, after the conclusion of this war, France commenced preparations for an expedition to the Pacific, with the aim of

continuing the work of James Cook.

24. The frigates, the *Boussole* and *Astrolabe*, under the command of Lapérouse, left the French port of Brest on an extraordinary voyage to circumnavigate the globe in August 1785. The scale of this voyage rivalled that of James Cook's. The expedition team comprised 11 officers, 17 scientists and 153 men. It explored North America, Japan and Korea and then headed to the South Pacific.

25. In December 1787, the expedition cast anchor at Maouna, Samoa, which is known today as Tutuila. While seeking water, de Langle, Captain of the *Astrolabe*, and 12 other men were attacked, and died on the island.

26. Notably, Lapérouse and the expedition team left without making reprisals, sailing via other islands in the Pacific to Norfolk Island, and then on to Botany Bay. Lapérouse noted in his journal that despite Captain Cook's description of a type of cabbage tree on Norfolk Island, they were unable to find any such trees. The expedition did, however, catch an abundance of 'red fish' which afforded an excellent meal.
27. Lapérouse records in his journal that the French had sight of Botany Bay on 23 January 1788, however the wind became very variable, and just like Captain Cook had done, the French experienced severe currents which repeatedly carried them 15 minutes south of their destination.
28. On 24 January, Lapérouse noted that there was a British squadron at anchor in Botany Bay, with pendants and ensigns that were plainly distinguishable.
29. He also went on to comment that he believed **“all Europeans [were] countrymen at such a distance from home”**. And here I'll digress for a moment.
30. This is quite a touching remark. Despite the near-perennial conflict between neighbours in Europe that was the hallmark of this period, Lapérouse could feel in the very distance away a change in perspective.

31. It would be three decades after Lapérouse before a strained form of alliance grew between the British and the French. It would be further decades before foreign policy tensions settled, more than a century after Lapérouse, by way of the Entente Cordiale in 1904. That different perspective was reflected two years later in Vanuatu – which first experienced European contact by way of a Spanish mission led by a Portuguese captain – which in 1906 became jointly administered by France and the United Kingdom.
32. Today, all Europeans are not just countrymen at such a distance from home – they are, for the most part, countrymen at home as well. 201 years after Lapérouse’s statement, the Berlin Wall would come down. Yet still, European unity exacts a toll, this time to devastating effect to the poor people and young soldiers of the Ukraine, where all countrymen do not yet feel European.
33. By the time Lapérouse’s expedition reached Botany Bay, the team’s priest and naturalist, Pere Receveur, was gravely ill. Despite a seemingly minor injury, Receveur died at La Perouse on 17 February 1788.
34. He was the first French person to be buried on the mainland and was interred in a headland grave, marked with a common headstone. In 1829, a tomb was erected over the site of his grave.

35. When Lapérouse arrived in Botany Bay, Governor Phillip was already in Port Jackson. In Phillip's absence, Captain John Hunter of the *Sirius* was assigned the duty of welcoming the French. British Lieutenants King and Dawes were amongst the first to establish communications with the French. On 2 February 1788, they paid the first formal visit on behalf of the Governor. The two lieutenants reported that the French were well established on the peninsula, with a garden, observatory and two partially constructed long boats that were enclosed by a stockade, defended by two small gun emplacements.
36. The French spent almost seven weeks at Botany Bay and during this time they repaired damage to their ships from the Samoan battle.
37. An observatory was established on the northern headland to allow Joseph Lepaute Dagelet to record observations and scientific measurements. These were some of the first European scientific endeavours to be conducted in Australia.
38. Dagelet made astronomical observations and calculations for recording map positions of Botany Bay. This information was later shared with Englishman William Dawes, which speaks to the scientific collaboration and exchange that is a hallmark of the European Enlightenment – with “all Europeans countrymen at such a distance from home” in a scientific community that was, for the European worldview, breaking new ground.

39. We admire this civility and exchange, especially when contrasted with hostilities back in Europe. It brings up questions of “what could have been”. And not just the usual: “if Australia had been a French colony” – because we all know what that would’ve been like... it’d be pretty much the same, but decades earlier. We’d have discovered good coffee and sophisticated dining earlier, we’d have had a national team in the Tour de France earlier, and we’d have made the finals of the Football World Cup decades earlier too. No, this “what could have been question” relates to the tragedy that followed.
40. The stark reality of the human condition, when facing what chance and nature may throw at it, simplifies things, and can strengthen our common humanity. This is part of the tragedy inherent in the experience of Australian settlement. The initial attempts to co-exist with Indigenous Australians at Sydney Cove were instinctive. All could feel their vulnerability at that moment.
41. As numbers grew and settlement developed, the personal became more impersonal, and instinctively humane responses were often swept away with notions of our other-ness. The consequences of this were vast and grave. I think this heightens why we admire such a humanitarian as Lapérouse. And La Perouse as a place in Sydney tells that whole, harrowing story.

42. During their time at Botany Bay, the French were focused on improving the overall health of the expedition team. In fact, Lapérouse noted in his journals that “sauerkraut, malt and spruce beer” were the best remedies for battling scurvy, which makes me reflect, that I’ve never heard of a German who got scurvy. He also mentioned that hygiene was an important consideration during the voyage, as was keeping a good diet... with “quality liquids and solids, such as wine and flour” considered the most helpful for French health.
43. Lapérouse knew his men needed fresh produce, and wrote to Charles Pierre Claret, Comte de Fleurieu, from Botany Bay on 7 February 1788, noting that from the time of his arrival in Botany Bay, there had not been a single case of scurvy and sickness after fresh food was obtained at the Navigator Islands.
44. In this correspondence, Lapérouse also advised Fleurier that his plan was to arrive back in Europe by June 1789, as this timeframe was all that the food and stock levels would allow. Lapérouse commented that this voyage had been the most considerable in length ever undertaken by a navigator.
45. Prior to leaving Botany Bay in March 1788, Lapérouse’s general itinerary had been established from the letters and documents transported to Europe by British Lieutenant John Shortland in the *Alexander*. Lapérouse intended to visit New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, the Louisades, the Solomons, and the Gulf of Carpentaria, then the west coast of New Holland and Van Diemen’s Land.

46. He anticipated arrival at the Île de France (now Mauritius) by December 1788.
47. However, by the end of 1789 there was still no news of Lapérouse, and concern in France had grown. Now that we're used to immediate, global communication, it's hard to imagine how, day by day, the grief would grow.
48. Despite the French Revolution, Lapérouse was not forgotten. In 1791, the Société d'Histoire Naturelle – the Society of Natural History – petitioned the National Assembly for a rescue expedition.
49. On 9 February 1791, in a Decree of the National Assembly, the King was requested to give orders to the “ambassadors, residents, consuls and agents, of the nation, in foreign countries, to intreat, in the name of humanity...to enjoin all navigators... particularly in the southern Pacific Ocean, to make all possible search, after two French frigates the *Boussole* and *Astrolabe*, commanded by M La Pérouse.”
50. On the open ocean, the law of the sea stands as one of the most interesting attempts at a universal, legal and ethical framework: a foreign country (in this case Britain via John Shortland) passing your correspondence in confidence, how those documents survived, was not unusual, but a necessity. Its internationalism means that good people seem great, and to be people before their time.

51. You were exposed to the vastness of ocean, and the smallness of the individual man, at the mercy of the weather and the sea. They had time to contemplate in a way that only oceans and deserts let you. And so, on the shores of an ancient land, whose people's wisdom was shaped by the sensitivity to nature's subtleties that deserts demand, we also saw the best fraternity that the sea can teach us.
52. In 1826, quite by chance, Peter Dillon, an Irish captain, came across artefacts of French craftsmanship near the island of Vanikoro. According to the locals, a shipwreck had occurred at night during a violent tropical storm, many years earlier, which left very few survivors.
53. Lapérouse was a navigator of exception, but his legacy is much broader than that. His story is part of the shared history of early exploration in Botany Bay. His story begins many of the themes of discovery for Europeans, of settlement and learning, but stands as a critique to the good and the bad that followed. This place, La Perouse, is possibly the perfect place in Australia to stand, take time, and reflect upon this history.

54. The French have been previously called the “hidden migrant” in the Australian story, with individuals often not even referred to as French-Australians, despite their often fundamental roles in iconic industries such as wool, in governance, in hospitality and in the arts.
55. In part, this is due to the Huguenot origins of many French-Australians, such as Charles La Trobe, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria, and Robert Gouger, the founding father of South Australia. Even the iconic Australian Rules player Roy Cazaly, famed for his spectacular marks, and the recently deceased Richie Benaud. Otherwise, it was due to the ease with which French-Australians entered a society, in which their traditions of excellence were prized and accepted.
56. Fortunately for us, the French were there at the start, and are still here now. And as with the early British encounters with La Perouse, today in encounters between Australians and French retain a civility and kindness, an open free exchange, respect and admiration.
57. Thank you for having me here with you tonight. I look forward to watching the growth of this museum, and the invaluable collection of items that tell the stories of our shared histories in La Perouse. Thank you for your contribution to keep alive a story that is so important for our community as Australians, and for the nation of

France.

58. Aux amis du musée Lapérouse, merci et bon chance ! Vive le France, vive l'Australie, vive le souvenir de Lapérouse!