

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



HAWKESBURY ALUMNI LUNCHEON

24 JUNE 2016

VC'S SPEAKING NOTES

I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people who are the Traditional Custodians of this Land. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples present here.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with pleasure that I welcome you to the 4th annual Hawkesbury Alumni Luncheon. I would like to welcome our distinguished guests, particularly our hosts:

- The Honorable Rick Colless, MLC and Parliamentary Secretary for Natural Resources and Regional Planning; and
- The Honorable Niall Blair, MLC and Minister for Primary Industries and Minister for Lands and Water.
- Along with The Honorable Paul Green, MLC.

All of our parliamentary hosts and guests here today are graduates of the Western Sydney University Hawkesbury campus.

I would also like to welcome:

- Mr Tim Ferraro, Graduate member of the Western Sydney University Board of Trustees, Executive Manager, Local Land Services and Hawkesbury graduate;
- Our guest speaker for today Professor Stephen Powles, Director of Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative at the University of Western Australia and alumnus of the Western Sydney University Hawkesbury campus;
- Associate Professor Robert Spooner-Hart, President of the Hawkesbury Foundation and Hawkesbury graduate;
- Dr John Keniry, Commissioner with the Natural Resources Commission and Chair of the Advisory Board for the Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment.
- Mr Darren Bayley, Principal of Tocal College and Hawkesbury graduate;
- Mr Darryl Currie, Principal at Hurlstone Agricultural High School; and
- Ms Christine Castle, Deputy Principal at Hurlstone Agricultural High School.

We also have a number of members of the University Executive and staff in attendance, including:

- Mr Peter Pickering, Vice President (Finance and Resources);
- Professor Gregory Kolt, Dean of the School of Science and Health; and
- Professor Ian Anderson, Director of the Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment.

The Hawkesbury alumni community is a very important part of the University's success. You are part of an alumni community of over 170,000 graduates who serve as our brand ambassadors and as role models for future generations of students and alumni. Welcome and thank you for being here today.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, you will have the opportunity to meet the recipients of prizes and scholarships funded through your gifts and contributions at past lunches. These students represent the future of our Hawkesbury campus and our University and we are very grateful for the support you have provided to make these prizes and scholarships possible.

I particularly acknowledge the contribution from Mr John Fairfax AO to kick-start the Hawkesbury Appeal, gifts from Mr Tim Ferraro from our Board of Trustees, and the gift from our newest OAM, Mr George Bennett, recognised recently for his service to agricultural education, and to rugby union. Congratulations George, and thank you all for your generosity.

The Hawkesbury Alumni Luncheon is an important event in the University calendar as we gather to celebrate the ongoing connections that Hawkesbury alumni have with the campus and the deep and abiding friendships they have with each other, friendships that continue well after graduation.

This year the University marks a significant occasion - the 125th anniversary of the Hawkesbury campus celebrated with an official service in March this year. While the University began operation on 1st January 1989, under the terms of the University of Western Sydney Act, 1988 passed by the New South Wales Parliament in December 1988, the predecessors of the University date back as far as 1891 with the establishment of the Hawkesbury Agricultural College.

In 1891, The Hon. Sydney Smith – Secretary for Mines and Minister for Agriculture, officially opened the Hawkesbury Agricultural College (HAC) – third such College in Australia and the first in NSW. The College's students came from Hurlstone Agricultural High School or from 'continuation' programs in the superior public schools which provided the connecting link between when students left primary education at 14 and entered the College at 16-17 years of age.

The Principal of the Hawkesbury Agricultural College proposed Australia's first degree in Agriculture in the early 1900s. In the mid-1970s, when the last principal of Hawkesbury took up his post and drew upon his experience of American land grant universities, he set about turning HAC into a 'university-like' institution.

Hawkesbury campus produced the university's first PhD graduate, Sharyn Armstrong. Rebel agriculture student and Jumbunna editor Michael Hartmann chose to take out the HAC Diploma rather than the new University's degree in 1991.

So you can see, the campus has a long and distinguished history; however, it also has an exciting future reflected in a number of initiatives planned for the campus, including the upgrading of its science facilities; the development of a new purpose-built facility for a STEM high school on campus; and the Hawkesbury Agripark initiative.

Just last month, the University's relationship with the NSW Police, established in March 2009 with the founding of the NSW Police Leadership Centre at Hawkesbury, entered its next phase with the opening of the Officers' Mess – Yarramundi. The Officers Mess was officially opened by the NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione APM; and Commissioner Scipione, in his opening remarks commented on his desire to see the Leadership Centre expand in the next few years.

We also recognise a renewed commitment to agricultural education and research at the campus. This commitment has been significantly bolstered by the NSW Government's \$35 million investment to relocate a selective Agricultural and STEM-focussed High School to the campus.

The Government's relocation of the school – known in its current location as 'Hurlstone' – to the Hawkesbury campus in 2020 will bring together two of NSW's most important and long-standing agricultural institutions in a highly progressive vertically-integrated education model.

Importantly, the State Government has committed to retaining a selective high school at Hurlstone's current Glenfield site as part of the transition. This represents a significant expansion of the highest-quality secondary educational opportunity across Western Sydney.

The co-location of our University and a selective STEM and agricultural high school will see the construction of purpose-built facilities for the school's 1,500 students, including high-tech learning spaces and advanced technologies, along with new boarding facilities, playing fields and outdoor learning spaces.

For the University, this very important partnership with the NSW Government will serve to significantly enhance our agriculture education platform in a collaborative and highly integrated way. It will serve to showcase the University's world leading science, agricultural, STEM and environmental research and facilities, placing them at the centre of teaching and research activities.

Agriculture contributes \$12 billion to the NSW economy. Deloitte Access Economics identified it as one of five 'next wave' sectors of the Australian economy in the wake of the mineral and resources boom. The outlook for the sector is strong, and the potential for us to become a global leader in agricultural innovation is real. This is why programs that combine the latest developments in agriculture with the core elements of STEM education are so critical. This is what we are building at Hawkesbury.

Hawkesbury is also the focus of the University's significantly progressed strategy to create an Agripark; a concentration of industry, teaching and research innovation in agriculture and agribusiness. As part of a broader Innovation Corridor stretching from Campbelltown in the south, Penrith in the middle, and Hawkesbury in the north, the Agripark will bring together world-leading expertise in land-based innovation in a peri-urban and internationally connected setting. With a focus on developing intensive, high-yield, technology interfaced agricultural practice, the Agripark will also work to address spoilage, logistics, distribution, production and market challenges in agriculture both at the domestic and the global level.

Initiatives like the Agripark and vertically integrated education are relatively new, but they are founded on the back of a strong history and tradition. The University is deeply proud of its connection to agricultural education, dating back to the commencement of the Hawkesbury Agricultural College in 1891. We are excited by the opportunities this partnerships provides to help us renew and progress this proud agricultural education tradition and to support Western Sydney's continued emergence as a key driver of Australia's innovation agenda.

Thank you for joining us today to celebrate Hawkesbury and our University. I hope you enjoy the opportunity to connect with your former classmates and teachers here today and I look forward to seeing you again at next year's event.