

A Fount of Ideas: Regional Australia's Turn
Inaugural Fairley Lecture
LaTrobe University, Shepparton
Thursday July 15, 2010

- I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that we meet on, and by paying my respects to their elders past and present.
- It is an honour and privilege to have been invited to present the inaugural Fairley Lecture that I have named 'A Fount of Ideas: Regional Australia's Turn'.
- Last Sunday, in Canberra at the National Gallery of Australia an exhibition ended of the work of the South Australian artist, Hans Heysen. I hope that some of you were able to see it. Heysen is one of many artists whose images of Australian landscapes are almost scorched into our consciousness: creek beds and mountain ranges bleached by endless sometimes misty sunshine, craggy gumtrees with their crackled clinging bark and yet a palette that somehow calms the eye.
- We are accustomed to being told that these are the traditional images of Australia presented in traditional ways. Having romanticized that imagery a bit, we might now be inclined to consign it to a store of memories and then get on with the rest of life.
- That would be wrong. That depiction of regional Australia was even radical and confronting in its own time to the generation for which it was painted, and is now a source of inspiration to artists of this generation. Rosemary Laing in her photographic works presents images of those bleached landscapes with different and more subversive messages. In one work, she even titles it 'After Heysen'. The idea of being lulled into thinking that the imagery of regional Australia is far removed from today's contemporary visual artists is wrong.
- So too is any idea that regional Australia may not have the full set of public policy tools available to it, or that it might be less innovative or more traditional in its approach to its social issues, or that it might think that life is being lived more richly elsewhere.
- What I wish to say is very simple. Regional Australia remains hugely influential to Australia's overall prosperity, and is increasingly influential in areas of social policy and reform. I would also like to suggest that regional innovation and ideas generation are

extremely well represented in the continuing development of our visual culture and also in the manner in which our philanthropic traditions have matured.

- The Andrew Fairley Lecture has been inaugurated to honour the memory of Sir Andrew and Lady Fairley and to acknowledge the ongoing contribution of their philanthropic legacy to the people and institutions of this city and region, our State and Nation.
- As well as being a great privilege, it is quite some responsibility to deliver an inaugural lecture, as it should in some way try and set the key for what follows. Its inauguration provides an opportunity to reflect on the significance of regional Australia to the nation's past and present and to canvass ideas about its future directions.
- I am sure that we would all like to see this lecture become as highly regarded and widely reported as the Boyer Lectures are on national issues. I hope that Speakers in the future might choose to make a major contribution not just to agenda setting and policy development for regional Australia, but explore the implications of such agendas and policies for the whole of the nation.
- The establishment of an annual lecture by La Trobe University at Shepparton also marks an important milestone in the development of the University in this city. It demonstrates the University's commitment to expanding the cultural and intellectual life of this community, something that I suspect would have pleased Charles LaTrobe.
- In his first speech in Melbourne, La Trobe declared,
'It is not by individual aggrandisement, by the possession of numerous flocks or herds, or by costly acres, that the people shall secure for the country enduring prosperity and happiness, but by the acquisition and maintenance of sound religious and moral institutions without which no country can become truly great'.
- His active dedication to these values, in a society motivated almost entirely by materialistic acquisition, left a heritage and an influence that benefited future generations. La Trobe was an active supporter of the religious, cultural and educational institutions, often initiating their existence and straining his limited income for their benefit.
- The establishment of this Fairley Lecture continues this LaTrobe leadership tradition. By its title that honours Sir Andrew and Lady Fairley, it celebrates a great achievement, a great story and a great legacy. It also celebrates the roles that innovation, fresh thinking, dedication and commitment can make in a lifetime to the economy of a region and how, through philanthropic practice, those same attributes can endure well beyond a lifetime.

- Sir Andrew was born on 1884 at Grangemouth, Scotland, fifth son of James Fairley, draper, and his wife Mary Agnes. The family arrived in Melbourne in 1886 and settled at Shepparton in 1887. Andrew was educated at Shepparton and later at Devon College, Launceston, Tasmania.
- On arrival in Shepparton, his father James worked in a grocery store, which he later purchased and expanded. When James died in 1907, the business was a prosperous department store chain, and it continued under the control of his sons Fred, William and Andrew.
- Andrew became well known in Shepparton for his drive and business ability. In the 1920s, he was invited to restore the fortunes of The Shepparton Preserving Company, which he did and under his guidance, S.P.C. became one of the largest co-operative fruit-canning plants in Australia. By 1929 all government loans and interest had been repaid. Until it had become profitable, he had refused to accept salary or expenses.
- Throughout this period, his fairness, as well as his firmness, were recognised by employees, and he established good relations with the trade-union movement. In his will, he left a legacy for each S.P.C. staff-member of five years standing.
- In 1927, he had become first mayor of the Borough of Shepparton, and in 1948 the first mayor of the city. He was also mayor in 1931, and for many years was chairman of the council's public works committee. He made donations to the municipal art gallery, and in his will bequeathed a substantial endowment, the income of which was to be used for the acquisition of works of art. The permanent collection gallery in the Shepparton Arts Centre has been named after him, and his portrait in oils by William Dargie hangs at the entrance.
- In 1934, he married his cousin Neta Stewart. Later Lady Fairley, there is little doubt that she gave great support to Sir Andrew and they were united and formidable in their many philanthropic acts. Survived by his wife, Sir Andrew died in Melbourne in 1965 and the bulk of his estate was used to establish the Sir Andrew and Lady Fairley Foundation for the benefit of registered charities in Victoria.¹
- Today, the Foundation is managed by cousins Andrew Fairley and Terry Campbell and focuses on supporting leadership, indigenous communities and disadvantaged young people.
- One of the reasons that I feel so honoured to have been invited to deliver this lecture is because of a joint heritage between our two families. My grandfather Sidney Myer began his retailing business in Regional Victoria in Bendigo.

- I can imagine that James Fairley and Sidney Myer would have been known to each other, although I am not aware that their businesses ever competed directly. The connection that my family feels with Bendigo is evidenced by a long association with the Bendigo Art Gallery and other philanthropic support to the surrounding communities over a hundred years. Sir Andrew's connection and now Andrew's connection with the community of Shepparton have maintained a century long tradition of support. From one draper's family to another, I take great pleasure in honouring that tradition.
- In acknowledging a life that both moulded, and was moulded by, innovative thinking in regional Australia, it seems appropriate to consider nearly half a century after Sir Andrew's death how that innovation continues and how its reach extends way in to the heartland of metropolitan Australia.
- However, at the outset, I should acknowledge that this view of regional Australia's innovation and influence is not universally held. Despite the rich history of creative thought and an abundance of opportunity in regional Australia, many today in metropolitan Australia give greater emphasis to the negative aspects of rural and regional life and barely any acknowledgement of the many positive aspects.
- But where exactly is this place called regional Australia?
- Of course it is too easy to generalise about non-metropolitan Australia and I concede to being somewhat casual in the repetition of the term regional Australia. The terms 'regional' 'rural' and 'remote' have become part of the lexicon used to describe what lies beyond the suburban fringes of our capital cities, but they need to be used with more care and are not interchangeable.
- Some places will meet all three criteria while some struggle to satisfy one. A town like Bourke in Western New South Wales is perhaps all three. However a city like Cairns in north Queensland is regional but hardly rural. It is very distant from the southern cities and even from Brisbane but, with an international airport, it hardly qualifies as remote.
- All of regional Victoria would seem like the outer suburbs of Melbourne to someone from outback Queensland or Western Australia where the distances to the State capitals are enormous by comparison.
- Cities and towns like Gladstone, Mildura, Katherine, Port Macquarie, Kalgoorlie, Kununurra and Launceston come under the broad definition of 'regional' but they are as different from each other as they are to Sydney or Melbourne.

- Remote communities like Hopevale, Halls Creek, Areyonga, Baryulgil and Peppimenarti are also different from each other but share some common challenges
- In all of our thinking about regional Australia we must acknowledge that it is a very diverse mix of climates, communities, economies, and eco-systems. In all its diversity, the regional reality permeates Australia's identity, spirituality and values as well as its economic foundations and prosperity.
- The report of the, not to be forgotten, Federal Government's 2020 Summit released in May 2008 referenced ways to promote a better social, economic and environmentally sustainable future for remote, rural and regional Australia.' It noted that participants expressed deep concern that urban Australia mostly holds a negative perception that is thought to be inhibiting remote, rural and regional Australia.²
- The challenges that face regional Australia should not be underestimated. The same Summit report noted that, in remote, rural and regional Australia itself, 'participants widely agreed that access to services and physical and social infrastructure lacked overall parity with urban Australia.'³
- In a Boyer lecture a little over a decade ago, Professor Geoffrey Blainey made comments on the 'cultural divide'. He saw as the key elements affecting cultural attitudes being an older and aging population; lower incomes; a larger indigenous population with high unemployment; fewer immigrants; more conservative views on gun control, the environment, and land rights and social justice issues; fewer educational opportunities and hence lower educational attainment; and the loss of links between country and city as fewer city people, especially immigrants now have family connections with the country.
- I cannot accept that regional Australia is a place of doom and gloom and a cultural wasteland. From the roles that I perform for the National Gallery, Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships and various philanthropic trusts, and from time spent in perpetual motion around all parts of Australia, that is not my experience or my observation.
- In these remarks I want to give emphasis to the cultural and social developments in regional Australia that embrace the arts, innovative social policy, partnerships, constructive philanthropy and good governance and a willingness to embrace change. These types of developments are usually associated with the cities but my observation is that there they often sadly remain unfulfilled aspirations. In my judgement, it is regional Australia where greater imagination is being applied to social policy and models of community leadership. There is also a vigorous creative expression leading the whole nation to consider itself in

ways that might have been unimaginable a generation ago. Metropolitan Australia is barely keeping up.

- In how we have come to consider ourselves, few would disagree that Australia's past was defined clearly by its rural rather than by its urban life. 'The bush', as we used to call regional Australia, was, during the first century of European settlement, a place of awesome challenges and outstanding opportunity.
- It was a place celebrated, even mythologised, by our poets and painters. We are all familiar with the works of Henry Lawson and the iconic images created by artists such as Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton. If anyone thought of an image of Australia it was not the reality of its predominantly urban and coastal settlement that was conjured up, but a scene of rural Australia.
- It was the wellspring of some of our most cherished moral traits including the notion of the fair go and it was where the patterns of drought, fire, and flood, perhaps pestilence also, were woven into our national fabric and gave rise to stories of heroism, determination, tragedy and despair.
- The assertion about regional Australia's time being now and its leadership in the nation's affairs is not that original. We have certainly been there before. Many of the country's most significant speeches were made in and about regional Australia. The ABC's *Bush Telegraph* program recently compiled some of the speeches they considered to be 'addresses that galvanised thought, and sketched the future outside our capital cities.'
- They include Peter Lalor's 1854 Ballarat Goldfields speech; Sir Henry Parkes and the Federation of the States at Tenterfield, New South Wales in 1889; Sir William McKell's speech on the Snowy Mountain Hydro Scheme at Adaminaby; Gough Whitlam and the Gurindji Land Ceremony in August 1975; and Miles Franklin and the Dedication of a memorial to Henry Lawson, given in Sydney in 1942 but celebrating how Lawson had claimed a place for the images of rural Australia in literature.
- In one of the many passionate and monumental speeches about regional Australia, she said so perceptively:

"Henry Lawson gave us this kingdom for our own, wove it so that we could feel it around us with the comfort of a blanket on fire-warmed nights. The warmth and tenderness of his writing made it vital so that he helped to give us a cosy mother country. Due to Lawson and his colleagues, now enjoying their literary rights were the gums, the bush, the creek: gully and spur and sideling: the paddock, the stockyard, the sliprails. We were on the track, and burning off down in the gully; hobble chains and camp ware were jingling to a time..."⁴

- Australia now is even more urbanised and the economy is highly diversified. Unfortunately there would be many young Australians who have never ventured beyond the fringes of the cities.
- My focus is on the role of regional Australia as a place of thought and ideas leadership. Presented at Latrobe University in 2003, Anita Angel, quoting David Lowenthal, noted in her paper, 'Northern Exposure: Landscape, memory and history in Australia's Northern Territory' that there are three ways we come to know the past: As memory, as history and as relics, the tangible evidence of the past. She noted that literary and visual past impressions can exercise our perceptions of the natural environment, our sense of self, community and nation.
- Her description of the development of our visual language and perception ought to be immediately familiar to each of us yet its relevance to our everyday is seldom acknowledged. She noted that we have journeyed in the representation of landscape, from: *'British and Australian colonists early depictions of picturesque vistas and domestic agricultural themes, through to the sweeping panoramas of sublime beauty in wilderness and frontier, from the romantic, melancholy and intimate interludes in Australian bush settings, to our robust, pioneering pre-Federation bush historicism; from the pastoral idyll of sunshine, sheep and gums of the inter-war period, through to the post-Second World War outback desert scapes of frontier folk heroes, anti-heroes and failed desert explorers – and so into the 21st Century.'*
- These depictions of landscape by our visual artists make the links between memory, narrative, story telling, and a range of cultural values. Their continuing innovation and interpretation in that representation of the 'real' enables us to be alert to everything that surrounds us.
- Our artists may no longer seek to capture the themes that characterised these earlier narratives, such as the Heidelberg School's paintings that speak of a new beginning, of simple and honest people toiling to build a new nation.
- More recently, new narratives inform visual culture. In the increasingly significant and very 'hip' world of video art artists, Shaun Gladwell took stark and haunting images of the outback to the 2009 Venice Biennale. So with Gladwell and Laing, and add Bill Henson, John Olsen, Tracey Moffatt, and a large number of our most prominent contemporary artists, it is regional Australia that continues to shape the aesthetic appreciation of our land and continues to give us our historical memory, shape our ideology and our identity.

- In one of the Deakin lectures delivered in 2001, Rodney Hall wrote that with the coming of the Europeans to Australia we had:
*“two races at opposite poles of cultural development. We now had the energetic and ruthlessly courageous Europeans, driven by the clock and notions of progress, whose chief pursuit was acquisition, in conflict with a culture based around vast languages entirely committed to memory. A culture based on ceremonial observations of a metaphysical system derived from the prevalence of spirits animating every aspect of land and air in a timeless continuum. No two peoples could have been further removed from or more incomprehensible to each other.”*⁵
- In that context, it is finally with some considerable relief, that for around forty years now, Australians have been acquiring a greater knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the culture and heritage of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Without in any way discounting the efforts of those engaged in the social and political struggles and their achievements and significant continuing challenges, the main vehicle for communicating Aboriginal Australia to the nation and the wider world has been the works of art coming out of the desert, island, and other communities in our cities and towns.
- It is important that we continue to acknowledge the many Indigenous artists as well as their non-Indigenous supporters, including the philanthropic sector, who sought to give recognition to and appreciation and respect for works of art whose quality and significance were so little known a generation ago.
- This wider spread appreciation has also led to a greater maturity in curatorial expertise, craftsmanship in mounting major exhibitions, publications and the emergence of criticism in the field of indigenous art.
- In the current Colour Country travelling exhibition of the art of Roper River, there are many works by the great artist, Ginger Riley Munduwalawala. The catalogue reflects on his ‘strong sense of identity and place, of knowing where he belonged and where he came from, provided an anchor to which he always returned in his mind.’ Here is an artist’s work dealing eloquently and beautifully with some of the great and abiding issues of our time: identity, place, belonging.
- At the heart of indigenous art is a regional diversity and dynamism, as well as a continuing innovation which is ‘rooted firmly in traditional culture and representations of country.’ The expression, ‘the future is the past plus innovation’ is apt for indigenous art where in a generation, there has been a continuing invention and re-invention in bark painting, acrylics,

printmaking and drawing, weaving and sculpture, video art, plastics, electric signage, ceramics, glass, conceptual representations and performance art.

- This abundance of creativity is in most cases regional Australia's contribution to our visual culture and it reflects boundless imagination and energy, often produced within the real constraints of isolation, limited professional development, poverty and disadvantage.
- If any of us were in doubt as to the primacy of ideas and imagination, consider the images that emerge from the communities and the stories that they reveal, the knowledge that they share and understanding that they yield. Right now, we should celebrate the role of regional Australia in creating one of the most significant art movements of the era, and the influence that it has had on our sense of place in the world.
- Having celebrated the role, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that, in regional Australia, there are fewer opportunities to get involved in the arts when compared to inner and outer metropolitan areas.⁶ My observation is that this varies hugely from region to region and that there are high levels of participation in the arts in those municipalities where an investment is maintained. It is true too that the manner in which the arts are first absorbed is different in regional Australia.
- In Shepparton, the Council's strategy for Arts and Culture is well defined and in the visual arts, the role played by the Art Gallery and the Festival are fine examples of how participation in the arts in regional Australia can be nurtured. Again, there are numerous examples of programs and projects in regional Australia having visibility at a national and sometimes international level.
- I am delighted that the Sidney Myer Fund International Ceramics Award is one such initiative; so too is the Indigenous Ceramics Award here in Shepparton supported by the Yulgilbar and Fairley Foundations. And I also add other significant regional initiatives such as the glass collections in Wagga, the print facilities in Darwin and Cairns and the exhibition program in Bendigo.
- Well known here in Shepparton but certainly less familiar to metropolitan centres is regional Australia's response on a daily basis to the major social and environmental issues of our time.
- Two social issues dominate: one is the settlement of refugee and other migrant groups into long established rural communities; the other is the attempt to remove once and for all barriers that prevent Indigenous Australians from enjoying the same health, education and employment opportunities as other Australians. Both of these are subsumed by the overarching need to build and maintain cohesive, creative, and to use Latrobe's now

unfashionable term, happy communities. The issue of resettling refugees in regional Australia has been back in the news this month as the Federal Government continues to grapple with one of the most vexatious major policy issues of our time.

- As you well know Shepparton has been one of the regional centres at the forefront of this policy initiative for many years now, and by all accounts is showing the way. Even the metropolitan press is at last acknowledging this.
- Only last week, The Age reported that
- *“Shepparton has an international reputation not just for the canned fruit it sends the world, but also for the people it takes in from that world. Now, with the suggestion that refugees should be made to settle in country areas with labour shortages, government agencies are looking to Shepparton as an example of how people from diverse ethnic backgrounds can live harmoniously.”*⁷
- This outcome will not surprise those who have been following the story from the beginning. An evaluation of the program for the Immigration Department four years ago found that:
- *“Everyone involved in the pilot is convinced that it has been a great success both for the entrants and for Shepparton.”*⁸
- Of course the people of metropolitan Australia have these aspirations as well, but there is not the same opportunity for engagement. Perhaps too, there is little urgency arising from the issues being less visible, obscured as they are by the myriad of other distractions and the insularity of big city living.
- It should not be surprising that, as regional communities become more creative and resourceful in managing our society and economy, the experience being gained should influence and inform national policy development.
- Perhaps more profound, potentially even more far reaching and certainly more controversial, is the attention being given in some regional centres, particularly indigenous communities, to welfare reform.
- With work in four communities in Cape York led by Noel Pearson commencing in the mid 2000s, and with significant philanthropic sector support, models of welfare have been trialled incorporating conditionality, income management and the Family Responsibilities Commission.
- This has been radical reform and, as observed by Paul Kelly in The Australian, has inexplicably been a media non-event though it ‘shatters 100 years of labour tradition’.

- Before the trial was even fully underway, some of the key ideas that were yet to be implemented let alone evaluated had been appropriated for the Northern Territory intervention. And now, Minister Macklin, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Minister, has taken these reforms in indigenous policy to Australia at large.
- We should be under no illusions that such policy shifts would be profound and have long term implications for the way in which successive governments will approach welfare for the whole nation. That such shifts might have stemmed from innovative thought and early implementation in regional Australia suggests again that what happens outside the nation's metropolitan hubs has become hugely influential. The speed with which the key tenets of welfare reform have been embraced more broadly reflects the confidence that our policy makers have in the ability of regional Australia to develop, implement and evaluate these social policy innovations.
- Not all social innovations are intended to test policy boundaries. Right now, we can observe across regional Australia, the development of projects, programmes and organisations trialling new ideas for indigenous Australia, some relating to health, some to education and training and some that aim to transition people off welfare and into jobs and independent living. Many are partnered by philanthropic Foundations, committed to social change, where strong local leaderships, improving governance and an evaluative culture are ensuring that progress is being made.
- So, what's next? Where will regional Australia take it to from here? Perhaps we will see trials of Field Officers, Case Workers, Probation Officers, Healthcare workers, Education officers operating outside their silos; further extensions of Family Income Management, hostel accommodation available for those in work, as will shortly be available in Halls Creek, and perhaps further alcohol restrictions and follow-up controlled trials in metropolitan areas.
- Much emphasis is presently being given to the development of community leadership and a sense of urgency around change. Similarly, energy from regional Australia is focussing on shifting norms and values without sacrificing cultural values, increasing levels of early learning and school retention
- A key learning that appears to be emerging from much of recent policy work is that Government policy cannot be 'one size fits all'. An emerging issue across regional Australia is to find ways for a greater refinement in policy. How do you differentiate between communities and their situation? How can policy be crafted to reflect difference?

- Finally, much of the innovative social policy has developed from partnerships between local organisations, corporate and philanthropic Australia. Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships has successfully recruited secondees from some of Australia's leading corporations who have worked successfully with indigenous leadership.
- Apart from creating an expanding cohort of young executives around the nation who are knowledgeable about indigenous Australia, their role has also been to challenge the Government's previously accepted role as sole source of policy input. As has been observed, here we have the sustained commitment of key organisations with their most valuable resource: their people. The influence of this beyond regional Australia could have unchartered consequences for how Government programs are conceived, developed and delivered.
- Throughout these remarks, I have commented on the role of the philanthropic sector. This has been quite deliberate as I have come to know full well how the sector has initiated, galvanised, nurtured and supported much of what I am admiring as regional Australia's leading role.
- The role of philanthropy and its innovative approach to supporting regional communities is not new. Indeed, in the 19th Century created by regional wealth, two philanthropic acts in particular characterised for decades fresh thinking and innovation. The first of these was the Elder bequest, established by Sir Thomas Elder and notable for its breadth and generosity and for the role that it played in the establishment of the University of Adelaide (yes its establishment), and remarkable support for the Art Gallery of South Australia. This philanthropy was created by successful enterprises across regional Australia, most notably South Australia
- The second was the philanthropy of Janet, Lady Clarke. Born Janet Snodgrass in rural Victoria, as the second wife of Sir William Clarke, Victoria's largest landowner, she supported numerous organisations in the areas of education, the arts and social welfare.⁹ She was particularly interested in the advancement of women and her support across Victoria was renown for its role in initiating, founding and nurturing new organisations to promote change.
- In more recent times, innovative regional philanthropy has been significantly boosted by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal which was founded in 1999 to give financial support for new approaches to regional and rural development.

- In its non-grant making role, it facilitates partnerships with many local organisations and provides mentor relationships which support many initiatives that require more than funding. The foundation supports the development of regional community foundations, and uses seed funding and challenge grants to move regional development project funding into a more dynamic context.
- In these innovative approaches to supporting regional Australia which have developed over more than 150 years, I observe along with Christine Edwards from the Myer Foundation, that:

‘philanthropy imagines new approaches; it dreams of change, and creates different paths to those of the present. It steps back from the mundane busy-ness of everyday events and sees something can be done differently and better. It shines a light on our prejudices current and past, and is an instrument for changing the way that people think about some thing.’
- In reflecting upon the influential role that regional Australia is playing across many facets of life and the two that have been referenced in these remarks, welfare reform and the visual arts, I would also like to suggest that philanthropy has displayed some consistent characteristics and that the Sir Andrew and Lady Fairley Foundation has been an exemplar of those characteristics.
- I observe practical ‘don’t wait to be asked’ philanthropy at work with many examples of an initiative being taken pro-actively whether it involves arts projects or indigenous support. There has often been effective use of leverage, of drawing others into a project to increase scale and scope and longer funding horizons.
- I also observe funding projects based on ideas and principles that have not yet been tested. ‘Social venture capital’ is how this is often described, and the way that this has been applied to many of the organisations that I have referenced reflects real risk, sometimes calculated and sometimes less so. In many instances, confidence in a project or an organisation is based on a pre-existing relationship with key individuals whose contributions has already been marked somewhere else. More often than not, a philanthropic approach has been based upon independent professional advice, provided with thought and care and with a strong sense of justice and compassion.
- The approach has been guided by a generosity of spirit that influences and informs the grant-making and non-grant making roles. This is not giving back; this is giving; and it is

giving that reviews its own effectiveness, especially where the funding has been directed towards risky projects displaying ‘bold persistent experimentation’.

- However, I caution that philanthropy is not universally admired and it has certainly attracted its detractors. The Government environment, if not hostile and unwelcoming to philanthropy, certainly remains sceptical towards it.
- Earlier this year, there was quite widespread outrage amongst some close to the Government that Treasury had ‘blown’ a chance to tighten the controls on philanthropy. This indicates that many would like to see its role and influence curbed. It would be foolish for those involved in philanthropy to think that their practice caused them to be immune from complaint and criticism. It is quite common for private and public comment to be directed at perceived mixed motives of the philanthropic sector. Little differentiation is drawn between the philanthropy of a single individual and the role that is played by the professional sector, and the subtleties of grant making are lost. The tone in the media sways erratically from deep suspicion to absurd sycophancy. The announcement of a philanthropic intention can be enough to cause accolades. Often this is in contrast to an actual substantial philanthropic act which gets ignored.
- I choose to linger on these issues at the conclusion of my remarks because I believe that philanthropy needs to remain vigilant to those who would oppose it, limit it or restrict its role in challenging existing policies and seeding new ones. I concede that there is always a risk that a project supported by philanthropy might capture public imagination but amplify an unworthy and ill-considered approach. However, the risks of not having an independent sector using its independence to advance other ways of thinking are much greater.
- In reflecting upon Charles LaTrobe’s desire to create a nation of enduring prosperity and happiness and the role that Sir Andrew Fairley and the Fairley family has played in supporting the communities in which their businesses flourished, there are some strong currents that have emerged: the support for creative endeavour, the inspiration of landscape and regional Australia to generations of Australian artists and contemporary expression, the trialling of new social policies in remote and regional indigenous communities and the influence that they are having on the whole of social policy and the centrality of strong and independent philanthropic support supporting innovative thought and practice.

- We are all fortunate to have vibrant, resourceful, imaginative and creative regional communities across the country that can weave together so many elements for the benefit of the whole nation.

Rupert Myer

15 July, 2010

1 <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A080488b.htm>

2 http://www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/final_report/2020_summit_report_4_rural.pdf

3 http://www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/final_report/2020_summit_report_4_rural.pdf

4 <http://www.abc.net.au/rural/telegraph/speeches/franklin.htm>

5 Rodney Hall "Being shaped by the stories we choose from our country" The Alfred Deakin Lectures, ABC Books, Sydney, 2001 p97.

6 http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/arts_participation/reports_and_publications/apr March 2010

7 <http://www.theage.com.au/national/shepparton-shines-as-a-haven-with-no-room-for-racism-20100706-zz1u.html> 7/7/10

8 http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/_pdf/shepparton_pilot.pdf

9 <http://www.jch.unimelb.edu.au/ladyclarke.php>