

ORDER OF AUSTRALIA ASSOCIATION ADF ORATION

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**‘FOR SOCIETY AND OF SOCIETY: WHERE THE ADF SITS IN
MODERN AUSTRALIA’**

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Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to present the Order of Australia ADF Oration for 2017. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered tonight, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders past and presents. I also acknowledge all of the indigenous Australians who have served this country in uniform for over a century.

My topic tonight is ‘For Society and of Society: Where the ADF sits in modern Australia’.

It is an interesting time in our society to broach this topic. It is not one that we spend much time on and there are a lot of assumptions made on this subject in our public discourse. Given our unique role in society, it is worth spending a little time discussing what underpins some of these assumptions.

Our role is to defend the country and its interests. In doing that we are called upon to be ready to apply lethal force on behalf of our society against our adversaries. We are the military element of national power; one that is always used in concert with the diplomatic, informational and economic elements. The exact mix of how these elements are used depends on what the national interest being pursued is. The military element is rarely used on its own and has to be integrated with the other elements to achieve the desired effect.

Whether, and to what end, the military instrument is used is unequivocally the purview of the Government of the day. Our job, put as simply as possible, is to safely execute the lawful direction of Government.

In contemplating the use of force the Government will explain the ‘Why’ to the Australian people and explain the ‘What’ to us, we will then use our professional military judgment to develop options for Government in ‘How’ we will safely and lawfully achieve the tasks required of us.

This is not an academic discussion, tonight over 3000 of our people are deployed around the globe in a variety of roles and guises – from combat, to institution building, to peacekeeping.

I was fortunate to be in Iraq in the last fortnight to see first-hand what our people in are doing in Baghdad and Taji as they train and assist Iraqi forces in enhancing their ability to defeat Daesh.

Our people are making a valuable, and might I say, valued, contribution in preparing the Iraqi Security Forces to fight a ruthless and barbaric enemy, one that inspires cowardly acts as we saw in Manchester this week, one that will happily use women and children to shield their operations, one that will booby trap buildings with civilians inside, and one that – for the most appalling propaganda purposes – will seek to generate casualties by firing from buildings and tempting coalition air forces to bomb targets that unbeknown to them house civilians.

I was also privileged to watch our E7 Wedgetail Airborne control aircraft crew in their 14 hour mission over Iraqi and Syrian airspace managing all aspects of the airborne battle. It's a draining mission which absorbs the whole crew, one that they repeat several times a week and show enormous skill in using this amazing capability.

I have previously visited our fighter crews and seen them return from long missions over Iraq drenched in sweat – certainly there is nothing glamorous about what our people do, be it at sea in our deployed frigate, on the ground or in the air – it is relentless but vitally important work.

I have started by talking about what we do because I think it frames the remainder of this oration. We have a very clear sense of our role and our assigned tasks. In our organisation there is no higher priority than executing operations directed by Government; it is the focus of the entire ADF senior leadership as we raise, train, and sustain the forces who are executing the mission even as we speak.

Yet despite the outstanding operational efforts of the ADF and our many successes, there are some who maintain that we are not focused on the mission and that we are distracted by other issues. Herein lies one of the reasons for this topic tonight, because at the heart of this criticism is a particular view of what the ADF's role in society should be.

So, what does our society want the ADF to be? Should we have a narrow view focused solely on the delivery of lethal effects on an adversary, or are we something more?

We assess that our society wants us to be the best trained and prepared military force that the country can afford. They expect that we are competent, apolitical, effective, professional and contemporary; able to meet any challenge presented and capable of defending our nation and our national interests against the threats we face.

In thinking about our role in society it is important to understand who plays a part in shaping what the ADF looks like and how it needs to adapt and adjust. That is very much a team game. As the people's representatives we work for the Government and clearly the executive, through the Minister for Defence and the Ministerial team, has a key role. It is a role I know Minister Payne takes very seriously.

Parliament too plays a legitimate and important oversight role particularly around how we manage and the segment of the public purse that is assigned to us. But it is not just about dollars, it's about issues and outcomes as well.

You only have to look at the role of the Senate and Joint Standing Committees on Defence and Foreign Affairs played in the evolution of the ADF's military justice system in the early 2000s. These committees were at the forefront of pushing for and demanding reform.

The media also play an important role in reporting on aspects of what we do and reflecting the public's view. To be fair, you could say the coverage is variable and often reflects the particular lens that the outlet views the world through. But despite the variability, the media remains a crucial part of our democracy.

These mechanisms are in place, quite rightly, to ensure that we reflect what society's expectations are of us. They oversee our activities, celebrate our successes and some, more keenly than others, let us know when we have got it wrong.

We can however also act on our own. As the senior leadership we are all stewards of the ADF and the three great national institutions that form its constituent parts. It is our responsibility to evolve the organisation where required. That said, our inherently socially conservative nature has in the past probably held us back, we have often lagged well behind societal change and have been slow to correct attitudes and behaviours that are not appropriate. We were rightly criticised throughout the nineties and noughties for not contemporising our forces. But it is something we have since embraced.

In implementing change none of us want to put our people at greater risk, compromise our capabilities or our ability to fight and win. But what we know, what we have learned through painful experience, is that failing to evolve can be equally, if not more, damaging to our force.

At the heart of our recent changes is our cultural change journey. In the ADF we fight and win in teams and no team, in any endeavour, can win if it is not cohesive, if its members don't feel valued for the skills and perspectives they bring and if they don't feel comfortable in the team setting – particularly if they are being asked to do things that any normal person is never asked to do.

We value a diverse range of views and perspectives, it gets you better outcomes – there is nothing unusual about this and there is a truck load of empirical evidence to support it, even in rigid hierarchical systems such as ours. He may not be the most conventional character to refer to in these sorts of debates but General George S. Patton recognised this when he said “if everybody is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking”. He also said “lead me, follow me, or get out of my way”, but I might save that quote for another speech.

The value that comes from diversity helps us broaden our expertise and reduce the unknowns. That's why we maintain that having an inclusive culture and a force drawn from as many segments of society as possible is a capability issue – it delivers the nation a better force, one that is more representative of the society it serves, more

open to innovation and able to develop better solutions to our complex military challenges.

One of the great ironies in this debate is that militaries have generally been exceptional at technological innovation and agility. We are so often at the forefront of research and development as it allows us to maintain our technological edge, enhancing and our ability to counter emerging threats.

Yet, at the same time we have seen much less agility and innovation when it comes to the social structures and cultural aspects of the ADF. In fact we often see the exact opposite of the technological innovation we strive for.

We wrap some of these issues in a protective layer and call them traditions. Don't get me wrong, many of our traditions give us an important sense of purpose and enshrine what is great about our military institutions. But, a small number provide a protective cover that perpetuates bad behaviour or rigidity in thinking; hence stopping us from modernising.

A few examples might be useful to show you some of what I'm talking about.

In late 2012, as Chief of Navy I changed some of our 'toasts of the day' used in Navy messes at formal dinners. Self-evidently there are seven of these toasts and they had been in place for over 200 years in the Royal Navy, predating the formation of our own Navy. They remain a great tradition, but there were problematic elements contained within some of them. The fact was we were still toasting 'our men' when 20 per cent of 'our men' were women is a case in point. So changing it to 'our sailors' seemed like a simple and logical modernisation initiative. We were clearly behind the times, we knew it didn't make sense and worse still it was offensive to 20 per cent of our workforce. But still the organisation agonised over the change. Interestingly though, the Royal Navy, where these toasts were born, followed suit just a few months later.

Our recent approach in relation to domestic violence is an example of a combination of public opinion shifting and our own leadership initiatives at work. Societal expectations set the 'what' but the 'how' was largely driven from within and we used the vehicle of White Ribbon accreditation as a way to effect change. As someone who had witnessed domestic violence in my childhood, I had a deep personal interest in this and so I pushed hard. As it turned out, I was not alone and we achieved White Ribbon accreditation in June 2014. At the time we were the largest organisation in the country to be fully accredited. The other two services have since gained accreditation. Collectively that has brought with it a different way of looking at issues that, until recently, were seen as private and beyond the purview of the workplace, rather than the criminal acts that they are.

In this instance we moved with society. We stood up and recognised the detrimental effect these issues were having on our capability, changed our policies, realigned our practices and ensured condemnation of this sort of behaviour was connected to our organisational values. These changes have been generally well received given the heightened community awareness that Rosie Batty brought as Australian of the Year in 2015. We are certainly not perfect – there are still instances, and individuals, that

challenge our stance on this – however I am proud to say the ADF was and remains at the forefront of institutional responses to this terrible scourge across Australian society.

More fraught has been the decision that we took in 2013 to allow ADF members, many of whom had been participating in the Sydney Mardi Gras in civilian clothes for a number of years, to join the NSW Police and wear uniforms in the parade.

As a senior leadership group it took about 15 months to make this decision. We believe it was the right decision, the only decision we could make if we wanted to show tangible evidence and send a strong message to the broader ADF that we as a team were committed to our cultural change path.

There is no doubt that the Mardi Gras started as a political event nearly four decades ago. We don't deny it. It was then social and political activism fighting for improved rights, recognition and acceptance for the Gay and Lesbian community. But as society evolved, so did Mardi Gras, and from its political roots it has emerged to be a celebration of pride and self-expression. More than that, it is now about inclusion and tolerance – that is why we participate; that is why each year our contingent includes members who identify as LGBTI and others who don't, marching side-by-side to show support for their workmates.

Of course elements of our society do not agree with the decision that we took. More conservative media outlets have attacked the move under the charge that it “politicises” the ADF. It is a charge that the leadership of the ADF utterly reject.

I grew up, along with many of you tonight, in an ADF where it was illegal to be gay, where people were investigated, charged and dismissed from the Services (albeit that seemed to be arbitrary at times). I grew up in an ADF where a colleague committed suicide because he feared being ‘outed’. It was a very different ADF to the one I see today, and frankly I know which ADF I want to be a part of – it's one where the focus is on what you bring to the fight, one that values the unique contribution you make, and one that does not exclude an individual because of their gender, race, religion or sexual orientation.

Some observers of the ADF look at the aggregation of the social and cultural change and believe that we are lost in some sort of politically correct swamp, “pandering to the progressives”. But, the context here is not just about change in the ADF but the broader change in the society that we are for and of. Society continually changes and so must the ADF.

Our response to decades of abuse in the three Services is I think germane. Given the weight of the allegations it would have been easy to fall into a defensive mindset or dismiss these issues as historical in nature – a by-product of a different society perhaps. We took a totally different approach; fully acknowledging the terrible wrong doing of the past and committing to the restorative engagement process where senior members of the ADF sat down with around 600 victims of abuse for many, many hours to listen to their stories, recognise the wrongs done to them and reinforce our commitment to change.

These were immensely powerful meetings and we all heard shocking and brutal stories of assault and sexual abuse. Many of these stories shook your belief in the organisation you served in. Listening to these stories, seeing the pain, which in the majority of cases was still raw after many decades, has changed the outlook of senior leaders and those that will fill the top jobs for the next couple of decades. What I didn't hear in these sessions was bitterness, just profound regret and sadness that their service to this country was taken from them because of the intolerant and criminal actions of others.

So, as society changes, how do we change with it? Who regulates that change? What is an acceptable lag time for the ADF to pick up on societal change? What aspects of societal change don't we adopt? And what mix of public opinion, ministerial direction, parliamentary scrutiny and our own initiatives helps frame the required change?

Let me return to why we are doing these things. We are not undertaking a social experiment; we are a warfighting organisation, one that has been on continuous operations in multiple theatres since 1990. Maintaining our ability to fight and win is paramount.

At the end of the day we are trying to build a better ADF, not only technologically but culturally and behaviourally. We cannot do that by remaining anchored in a cultural context of past decades, which reflected vastly different societal views and norms to that of the society we are part of today.

Our forbearers have left a unique legacy and as a result we have a special and privileged place in Australian society. We guard this jealously and we cannot afford to lose the support of those who we serve. But we must continue to evolve to maintain our skills and our relevance in society. We cannot be seen as a curious anachronism in society when we are both of and for it.

At the end of the day, as with most things in life, that evolution is about balance. How we achieve that balance is, as I have described, a team effort. How the ADF changes comes down to the actions and commitment of its senior leadership and the belief of its men and women to the cause they are pursuing.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you tonight.