



**WELCOME ADDRESS AT THE
CRAWFORD FUND'S ANNUAL FOOD AND SECURITY CONFERENCE**

**BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MALCOLM McCUSKER, AC CVO QC
GOVERNOR OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

MONDAY, 26 AUGUST 2013

Thank you, Mr Bill Repard, for your kind introduction.

Hon. John Kerin, AM, Chairman, The Crawford Fund, who brings to this Conference a wealth of knowledge and experience as a former Commonwealth Minister for Primary Industry and Energy

Hon. Dr Florence Chenoweth, Minister for Agriculture, Liberia and Africa Prize Winner

Hon Professor Sospeter Muhongo, Minister for Energy and Minerals from the Republic of Tanzania

*His Excellency Mr Festus Mogae (**pronounced Mo-high**), the former President of Botswana*

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Guests from around Africa and Australia

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to you, on behalf of the State of Western Australia.

I acknowledge and offer my respects to the original inhabitants of the land on which this building stands and its spiritual custodians the Mooro Whadjug [**Pronounced More-O Wodge-uk**] clan of the Noongar people, whose totem was the grey kangaroo. Each December they used to hold an annual event – Goominingup – chasing kangaroos to their death over a cliff near here, feasting on them, and using their skins for cloaks.

A bit of history: on this day, 26 August, in 1768, Captain James Cook left England on a voyage which took him to the South Pacific and the East Coast of Australia. On behalf of Britain, he claimed it; or some of it anyway. No one had as yet circumnavigated Australia to see if it was actually one continent, until Matthew Flinders did at the beginning of the 19th century.

When the French explorer, D'Entrecasteaux visited the north-west, he reported (correctly) that it was hot, arid and inhospitable. The reason why Western Australia was first occupied in 1827 at Albany was just to trump the French, who had already explored much of the West Coast. Captain James Stirling, when he sailed up the Swan River in 1827, reported fertile lands. This resulted in the Swan River Colony's establishment in 1829, with Stirling its first Governor, but the colonists who followed and ventured north or further inland found that Stirling had been unduly optimistic. People of mainly British stock, they brought farming practices which, in many cases, were unsuitable for this hitherto unknown and unfarmed land; and which by much trial, often error, had to be adapted by the settlers, to whom dry-land farming was a mystery, and droughts almost unknown.

The topic of this conference is to consider how the wealth from the extractive industries can be used to benefit the agriculture sector and the broader community, in particular communities in and around mining areas.

This is the important question that has brought you together. Any issues in the relationship between the two sectors are best addressed by people of goodwill from each sector working together, with a synergistic, not competitive, approach.

For Australia, and I suspect the many countries of Africa represented here tonight, there can be few more important topics, and I congratulate the Crawford Fund and the Africa Australia Research Forum on joining together to host this Conference during Africa Down Under.

The inter-relationship of agriculture and mining is a very important and current issue: the impact of mining on exchange rates and the availability of skilled labour and, more recently, the impact on sustainable agriculture of the gas mining process known as “fracking” need to be addressed thoughtfully.

As a boy, I wanted to be a farmer, but my family had no money for even a deposit. So I studied law, but when I became a partner in a law firm, I joined in buying a cattle and sheep farm in Gingin. I have been continuously involved in, and fascinated by, farming ever since. My property at Calingiri north of Perth runs cattle and sheep, and currently has a crop still growing of 4,500 hectares of wheat and canola. It looks good at the moment – so good I was tempted to show you some photographs which our cautiously optimistic farm manager sent me last week. But I know from long experience the many pitfalls that farmers face – lack of finishing rains, disease, pests, frost, low prices: My manager and I never go to the casino. Farming is a big enough gamble! And even if all goes well, which is rare, the return on capital is, low. You need to be a true believer in agriculture’s future and importance. And I am.

One of your distinguished guests here tonight is **Professor David Lindsay**, a member of the Western Australian Committee of the Crawford Fund. About 30 years ago, when David was Dean of Agricultural Science at UWA my late father and I set up, with the University and the WA Department of Agriculture, a research project seeking to improve productivity of the dry, deep and highly unproductive sands of the parts of coastal plain of Western Australia. The research benefited many farmers. It was very gratifying when, as patron of Landcare, I presented an award for sustainable farming to a farmer who said *“I owe this award, and the increased capacity of my property, to the research you and your father sponsored”*. Dry land farming methods are of great importance to Australia and Africa, and each can learn from the other.

Although it is an Australian body, Crawford Fund’s motto, “For a Food Secure World”, demonstrates its appreciation that “food security” is a global issue, which demands international co-operation, and exchange of information and technology.

The world’s population is forecast to be 9 billion by 2050. Its viable agricultural land is diminishing due mainly to soil degradation, urbanisation and increased drought. It is estimated that, at the current rate of loss of viable farm land, there is likely to be a reduction in global food production. Food producers face an enormous challenge. To meet it, they must use all the expertise and experience available, wherever it may be; and more funds need to be devoted to research, funding for which has, regrettably, been reducing over recent years.

Already, more than a billion people lack adequate food and water. Unless agricultural productivity can keep pace with growing demand for nutritious food from an increasing population, even more will go hungry. This is a recipe for civil unrest and instability. Agricultural research and innovative farmers are crucial, if we are to avert that catastrophe.

Australia has always been at the fore of agricultural research and innovation. The impetus was its very small area of naturally fertile lands, low rainfall, and the poor quality of much of its soil. In WA, much of the land on the coast was only rendered productive by research, establishing the need for trace elements such as zinc, copper, potassium, molybdenum.

At present WA, with 10% of Australia's population, produces close to 50% of Australia's export income. This is very much due to its mineral resources, especially iron ore. But, like all countries, including a number of African states, where the economy is heavily dependant on mineral exports, we must ensure that other important industries – especially agriculture – do not suffer from what is called “the Dutch disease” and are rendered unviable or destroyed.

The prominence of the mineral resource industry should not obscure the importance of agricultural development – in Australia and globally. Nor however should we ignore the importance of the extractive industries to Australia and to Africa. I once observed, on that point, “you can't eat iron ore”, or, as the title of this Conference puts it, you can't make “bread from stones”, directly at least. It is clear that we must find ways for the mining and agricultural industries to work together, towards a common goal of economic and social development.

Mining revenue might be used to promote agricultural research and development, to help arrest soil degradation, and restore degraded lands by re-forestation. And there is also the exciting potential, when deep mining requires the extraction of underground water, for the irrigation of otherwise unproductive land for cropping – something already under way in part of the north of this State. So the two sectors can work together and produce “bread from stones”.

I wish you well in your deliberations, and hope you will also find the time to enjoy Perth's hospitality and scenic beauty. Those who are visiting this State for the first time, if able to venture outside the Metropolitan Area, or even just find time to stroll through the beautiful Park in which this Centre stands, will learn why it is dubbed “The Wildflower State”.

Thank you.

I now call upon Dr Denis Blight, the chief executive of the Crawford Fund and an expatriate Western Australian and graduate of the University of Western Australia to reflect, briefly, on the life of Sir John Crawford.