Address by Dr Peter Hollingworth

Transcript of the Governor-General
Peter Hollingworth
"Festival of the First Flag"
Townsville
8 August 2001

Thank you to Mayor Tony Mooney and Mrs Mooney, members of the Federal and State Parliaments, Representatives of Local Government, Leaders of church community

Thank you for your warm welcome to my wife and me. One hundred years ago next month, the people of Townsville welcomed Australia's first Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun to the city and bestowed on him a great honor.

Today, in my first weeks of service as the nation's 23rd Governor-General and my first visit to North Queensland, I've been invited by the Townsville City Council to take part in a similar ceremony. Similar in form. Similar in terms of the official people involved. But in 2001, as we mark 100 years of nationhood, the unfurling of the Australian flag carries so many more proud layers of meaning to the people of Townsville and to people across Australia.

When Lord Hopetoun visited the city at short notice in September of 1901, the idea of inviting him to unfurl the new nation's recently designed flag was a great achievement in public relations masterstroke. The Commonwealth Flag had been raised only once before on September 3, just a few weeks earlier in Melbourne, by Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton. Because the ailing Governor-General had chosen to spend the cooler months up north at his brother-in-law's property in Cairns, it was his wife, Lady Hopetoun, who had taken part in the Melbourne ceremony. The Governor-General's first chance came in Townsville when a local sail and flag-maker William McKenzie decided off his own bat, it would seem to make a replica of the newly designed flag for Lord Hopetoun to unfurl. And when he did, tile significance was not lost on the crowd that had gathered to meet him at the Town Hall, or on the recently installed Governor-General himself who declared:

It has afforded me very great pleasure indeed to unfurl this grand new flag, and I feel highly honored that the first time I have been present at its unfurling should have been in Townsville, the Queen City of the North.

One hundred years later, the Australian flag stands, as it did then, as a symbol of unity. But after 100 years of nationhood, it bas come to symbolize much more in terms of our national character and our achievement in many fields. For many Australians, and for residents of Townsville in particular, the flag is strongly associated with our military history. And with the brave men and women from Australia's armed services who, in war and in peace, have done credit to our country and helped shape our identity as an independent nation.

This week these two proud stories of Townsville - the story of the Governor-General and the flag, and the much 1onger story of the city's military history come together in Federation North - Townsville's centerpiece event for the Centenary of Federation. Over the next four days the city will host visitors from allover Australia. A variety of activities, ceremonial and celebratory, will reflect on history, inform and entertain. While many centenary events over the last six months have focused on our political history, Federation North is more about people and the role they've played in shaping Australia over one hundred years. The point has not been lost on me that it was the vote of the people of North Queensland in the crucial referendum, in voting yes for federation that Queensland agreed to join the Commonwealth. So this is an occasion for governments, the armed forces and the people to celebrate our shared achievement, and reflect on how, together, we continue to build on a strong foundation to create a just and caring society.

So it now gives me great pleasure to officially launch Federation North. And to say, in the words of my predecessor, that I, too, feel highly honoured to have been present for this historic unfurling of the Australian flag in Townsville, the Queen City of the North.