

2015 Creswell Oration
Rear Admiral Stuart Mayer CSC and Bar
Commander Australian Fleet



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Thank you _____ for your kind words of introduction. It is a true delight and privilege to have been asked to deliver the Creswell Oration on the 114th anniversary of the foundation of the Australian Navy.

- In February 2014 the former Chief of Navy Ray Griggs asked in a speech at the University of Sydney*Does our national outlook allow us to meet the geo - security challenges of the Indo-Pacific?* This was – and remains - an important question, and I am not sure that he received an answer.
- At the heart of this question is the recognition that a nation’s sense of itself determines the way it interacts with its environment.
- In Australia’s case I would argue that we have a sense of cognitive dissonance about ourselves. We see ourselves as landsmen, shaped by the poetry of Patterson, by the notion of the outback and the legend of the Digger. For some of this image there is good reason; with an economy that first rode upon the sheep’s back, and more latterly along the iron ore highway, and for generations of Australian’s that have travelled through country towns with memorials dedicated to our fallen soldiers, our sense of the land is acute. But for all the poignancy of these images they fall short in explaining the reality of Australia as a nation.
- In the same speech at Sydney University, Griggs observed *Australians have for over a century been obsessed with whom we are and where we sit both globally and regionally. Why is it then that as a nation we seemingly cannot come to grips with a really big but very basic idea – that Australia is an island, a maritime nation, one that is utterly dependent on the sea for its prosperity and security? Why is it then that our national anthem would be more reflective of our true national outlook, if it said that we were girt by beach, rather being than girt by sea?*
- In recent year others have expressed similar sentiments: Professor Mike Evans has characterised Australia as a maritime nation with a continental culture and Michael Wesley opines that we lack a maritime imagination. For me this strategic disconnect is at the core of any consideration we may give to the issue of geo security from an Australian perspective.
- But this is not a new idea; in fact the same sense of misplaced identity was at the core of the struggle that Creswell faced as he argued for the resources to establish a credible naval force. There are many parallels with the discussions about naval force we have today, and those which Creswell pursued at the start of the last Century. While the technology may have changed – and in some cases may not – the strategic realities and the sea blindness of those that have not looked beyond the beach have not. While we like to think our strategic debate is more nuanced and sophisticated, the reality is that in so many ways it is the same old wine, just in a newer wine skin.
- Sea lines of communication remain the lifelines for Australia's prosperity. The wealth of our nation in the early 1900s was generated through wool and wheat - today it's the mineral boom. I can sense many of you think the term boom is

behind us, but in reality what has changed has been that the rate of growth has declined not the market itself, and with slow decline in the value of the dollar the mining sector remains – and the sea lines that enable it – as important now as any time in the past decade, and our economic success remains dependant on shipping for exporting our produce to the world's markets. The vast majority of our imports also arrive by sea.

- Again this is nothing new, Creswell observed caustically in a 1902 parliamentary report: *'The spectacle of some five million Anglo-Australians, with an Army splendidly equipped, unable to prevent the burning of a cargo of wool in sight of Sydney Heads, is only the ordinary consequence of a policy of naval impotence'*.
- While the description of us as Anglo-Australians is no longer apt, and nor would I seek to describe our naval policy in the same way, the importance of trade to Australia is perhaps more acute than it was for the Australia of the last century. While our population may consider itself girt by beach, our economy does not have this luxury; it is inextricably linked into the world economy and it depends for its health upon the free flow of goods. A trend that is only increasing.
- We no longer hold reserves of basic commodities, preferring to rely on 'just in time' shipments of consumer goods and fuel to keep our economy running. A blockage in any of the main arterial routes that supply Australia will ultimately lead to an immediate and profound impact on the quality of life of everyone here at home.
- Australia is part of a global commons and this being the case we cannot find our security at home, we must deliver it over the seas on which trade flows. We will achieve this by being part of a rules based global order where the movement of trade is unimpeded, and Australia can pursue its place as part of a wider global trading system.
- Today as we sit together and enjoy this lunch the crew of HMAS *Success* are doing their bit in contributing to this outcome. Deployed to the Middle East Area, *Success* and the 58 previous rotations of RAN warships to the region are helping to build the sort of stable environment upon which world trade depends. Through the Red Sea and Bab Al Mandeb and into the Indian Ocean; along the coast of Somalia and Oman, the crew of *Success* does her bit in keeping the promise made by Creswell all those years ago; a Navy can and will keep the trade routes alive.
- But before moving off this theme perhaps you will let me boast a little on our achievements. The waters off the Gulf of Aden witnessed 226 piracy incidents between 2009 and 2013. The joint efforts of Navies in the region however reduced the number of such incidents to just four in the first half of 2014. Somali waters witnessed 435 piracy incidents in the five years (2009-2013), while three incidents were reported in the first half of 2014. These numbers indicate the very successful campaign that has been waged by the CMF,

NATO, EU, and yes by Japan, Iran and China – all of whom who have acted in their national interest to protect trade.

- Creswell saw the importance the Navy would play in protecting trade and national wealth before we had completed our first deployment; indeed one of the first CNF deployments he oversaw was not a combat deployment, but a policing one in the North West region of our country. His statements about the critical role of the Navy in protecting trade and in a wider sense the national interest, in 1902 resonate as strongly now.
- In 1905 and 1906 Captain Creswell wrote to the new Australian Government on the requirement for an Australian Naval Force and the capabilities needed in its ships. He supported his case with a strategic assessment that *'For a maritime state unfurnished with a navy, the sea, so far from being a safe frontier, is rather a highway for her enemies; but with a navy, it surpasses all other frontiers in strength'*.
- Creswell was a persistent agitator for the Navy. His argument did not vary. Australia's strategic reality dictated that the young nation would need to be able to defend itself upon the sea. But if nothing else, the history between 1905 and 1909 shows the importance of three things; have a consistent and clear message, build understanding with the political leadership – of whatever shade – and seize opportunity when it presents itself.
- Creswell was a master in telling the Navy story. It was not complex, it wasn't alarmist, but it was, however, based in a realistic understanding of the strategic environment.
- Unlike those that argued the security of the nation could be sub contracted to the Royal Navy. In 1909 Creswell observed, *'should war occur and the Imperial Squadron be ordered to rendezvous elsewhere, the Commonwealth will be naked of sea defence. The whole trade and business life of the Commonwealth, property worth many millions, will be at the mercy of any raider, even of the weakest, which would be able to carry out any of [a number of attacks] with the most perfect impunity, and it must be kept in mind that not one penny of the present expenditure on defence will avail to prevent it'*
- Creswell was perhaps our first strategic thinker to champion the need for self reliance. Not to act alone by choice; but rather to act in the national interest un beholden to the movement of the Imperial Squadron. The defence of the nation was then and remains now a sovereign issue. While it can be tempting to defray the cost in the expectation that someone more powerful will defend you on the basis of common interest or allegiance, ultimately this would involve a risk that should not be borne.
- The story of the Navy that Creswell championed was outward looking, engaged and proactive. It was about looking at the challenges in our region and knowing that a sovereign capability to control the sea approaches to Australia was vital.

- When we look at what it is that Navy does today we have the same challenge to address. Our region is undergoing tremendous change. The growth of nations such as China and India, the stop start resurgence of Japan and Russia and the growth of 'next tier' nations all present a challenge to the security in the region. It's not that any one nation presents an immediate challenge to Australia or our interests, it's that the regional architecture needs to shift in recognition of changes in relative power, influence and needs of the nations concerned. Change creates an uncertainty that we have legitimate interest in managing.
- One of the implicit assumptions that has guided our strategic thinking, has been the distance Australia is from points of contest. These distances are shrinking rapidly. Whether it is in the increasingly interconnected economies, the importance of cyber sovereignty or in the sheer physical congestion of the naval deployments, Australia is no longer remote. Last year's deployment of the Russian Navy to the Coral Sea, as well as a number of other less reported deployments in our immediate region, indicate that we are no longer out of the way – the distance is just not great.
- The other more subtle change in the way powers that are acting in our region is that they are increasingly acting in the maritime domain. The resources they seek, the sea lines they want to protect are all in the oceans of our region and the biggest developments in their investments is in two areas; maritime capabilities and in cyber. The challenges of the time of Creswell are just as acute today. If we seek to influence the outcomes of the changing environment we need to do it on and around the sea. In this way a Navy plays a vital and enduring role.
- The second thing that Creswell did particularly well was influence the decision makers. I would love to tell you that I can decide how many frigates we should have – more than 12 -, or perhaps where tankers or submarines should be built; however these are rightly decisions of the political leadership. Creswell understood this and he was particularly adept at bringing these political leaders around to his concept for a modern Navy.
- Between 1905 and 1910 there were four Prime Ministers, although Deakin was there twice, and five Defence Ministers. Few of these came with a background in Defence or of naval matters, but each was charged with the authority for the decision that needed to be taken – a brave decision that no other Dominion was prepared to follow – to form a Fleet unit. Creswell was able to achieve results through his ability to engage with and create conviction in the political leadership. A rare skill, and one which has just as important role today.
- The reason that this challenge is so profound is that you are working against a land centric culture, and trying to get government to invest in a capability in competition with other social needs that are more immediately relatable. It is far easier to build a case for a hospital than it is to invest in a new land attack

missile. The process of building maritime awareness is an ongoing one, and it can only be helped if we have a clear and consistent message.

- Much as the naval purist would prefer it, Defence needs to deal in a political world – a world full of changing governments, changing priorities. The importance of a well educated political leadership, of both sides is critical. Navy need to have bi-partisan support, and that support needs to be sufficiently robust that financial support continues even in austere financial climates. But equally when the financial climate is austere we need to shape our expectations accordingly. Creswell understood the criticality of this and Navy needs to help develop political minds that are maritime aware – for us stability in political leadership is less important than stability in political commitment to a credible Navy.
- It had been a difficult path, but the foresight of men like Creswell, Deakin and Fisher was amply rewarded in 1914 when the powerful German East Asiatic Squadron was decisively deterred from carrying out its plans for cruiser warfare in the Pacific. But for the Navy, wartime Prime Minister W.M. 'Billy' Hughes later declared, 'the great cities of Australia would have been reduced to ruins, coastwise shipping sunk, and communications with the outside world cut off'
- The final element is the ability to seize on the main chance. When opportunity presents you must be able to respond. The 1909 Imperial conference and the argument of Jackie Fisher created a moment in time and in the response to this opportunity. This means the ground work needs to be completed and the people need to be positioned to respond with agility.
- Berthed at Fleet Base East is the largest warship to ever serve in our Navy. The 27 500 tonne HMAS Canberra III. My first dealing with that ship was in 2001 – and it took almost 13 years from concept to commissioning. By contrast the period between 1905 and 1913 to deliver a Fleet Unit appears like the very acme of agility. Each idea will have a time that it can come to fruition and we need to be ready to seize it as they appear.
- Canberra is a wonderful new capability for the Navy, the ADF and the nation. It is some of the things that are new for us, but perhaps for some of the veterans here it is less so new for you. We are looking forward to welcoming Adelaide to the Fleet later in the year and in the years to come we will see the Air Warfare Destroyers and new replenishment ships.
- For the next few years we will re-learn the art of operating in task groups, typically based around one of the LHDs and we will increasingly harness the full potential of a Joint force operating in a maritime domain.
- As ever our strength will be in the quality of our people. For those that lament the failings of the current generation, all I can say is come and see our men and women, they make you proud to be Australian, and proud to be a sailor.

- Increasingly we will take advantage of simulation to prepare our people to the highest possible standard. I believe our use of simulation is potentially the fulcrum by which we will affect the strategy to deliver on our potential as a Fleet. Rather than using our ships as floating classrooms – a role that I neither have the luxury to pursue, or the desire noting its debilitating cultural effect. Simulation will provide the means to unstick congested training pipelines and achieve the intensity of training we need. Perhaps you will allow me to provide you two examples of why this is important.
- The first is in the preparation of our young warfare officers. In the past they earned their credentials by standing on the bridge and moving from notebook to chart and finally to pelorus for the final test. Now they will achieve what used to take 9 months in about 4 months by being posted as a class to the *Gatacre*- or perhaps what you better know as the Bridge Simulator. Operating this simulator as a concentrated training environment, officers watchkeep in the *Gatacre* in sea watches and experience a progressively demanding series of challenges mentored by former navy Commanding Officers and current navigators. This training is challenging, intense and realistic, with the net result of us producing more officers to a higher standard in less than half the time. We are in the process of rolling this training out to medical, engineering and aviation communities and we will actively seek more opportunities to continue this program
- The second example is in the way that we train our ships. A typical threat to our ships involves a weaving cruise missile that travel at 2-4 times the speed of sound and in the terminal phase is less than 12 m above the surface of the ocean. This weapon will have more kinetic effect than a cruisers broadside when it hits.
- To train against live targets that replicate this capability would not only be cost prohibitive, it would be dangerous in and of itself. Through simulation we can link ships alongside and at sea – in our Navy as well as those of key friends – and expose them to the sorts of contemporary challenge they will face if called on to go in harm's way. Only through simulation can this be achieved.
- Hopefully you might agree that this new approach is indeed an important one, it is not cheap or simple, but it is transformational. But even that being the case it is still doing that which Creswell sought to do all those years ago; equip the Fleet with properly trained and experienced people, able to defend Australia's national interest on the high sea.
- We pay homage to Admiral Creswell by calling him the 'Father of the Australian Navy'. Many of the issues he dealt with over a century ago remain relevant, and many of the processes he put in place remain today, albeit with different titles. The concept of self reliant Defence of Australia, the importance of trade, the need for a strong Navy in an uncertain world, and while I haven't spoken about it today, even his commitment to a domestic shipbuilding industry all have a familiar ring.

- One of my sons bought me a coffee cup a couple of years ago with the saying '*the older I get the smarter my parents seem to be*'. I don't know if it was a confession or a joke. However, the longer that I serve and the more I understand this profession of the sea the more I come to esteem those that went before me. The core elements of the naval service are enduring – why Australia needs a Navy is a constant. The uniforms may have changed – and yes the lapels too – the ships may be larger, but the mission remains the same. We defend Australia beyond the sight of the shore, we create the conditions by which all Australians prosper and we do so as an independent and sovereign Navy – excited by our future, but indebted to those that shaped our past.
- If the young Royal Australian Navy ever had need of a Vision Statement when it formed then I am sure the one Creswell would have established would have been '*To Fight and Win at Sea*' – just as it is today. Creswell is not a parent listening to outdated music or wearing shirts with overly wide lapels – an image I must convey to my own kids – but a parent whose common sense and vision has endured – his vision and message is eerily contemporary. We may have put the substance in new packaging, but it is the same old wine, just in a new wine skin.
- Thankyou.