

Speech by Her Excellency Ms Penelope Wensley AC, Governor of Queensland

31 October 2013

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier, The Honourable Glen Elmes MP,

His Excellency the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Canberra and of Latin American Ambassadors to Australia, Ambassador of Argentina, Mr Pedro Villagra Delgado,

And fellow Ambassadors from:

The Republic of Chile, His Excellency, Mr Pedro Pablo Diaz Herrera,

The Republic of Colombia, Her Excellency, Dr Clemencia Forero-Ucros,

El Salvador, His Excellency Mr Manuel Gutierrez Ruiz,

Ecuador, His Excellency Mr Raul Gangotena Rivadeneira,

The Republic of Peru, His Excellency Mr Luis Quesada Inchaustegui,

Uruguay, His Excellency Dr Ricardo Varela Fernandez,

Madam Honorary Consul for Brazil in Queensland, Ms Sallyanne Atkinson AO,

And Madam Honorary Consul for Chile in Queensland, Ms Kathy Hermosilla-Silva,

Assistant Secretary, Canada and Latin America Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr Richard Neumann,

State Director, Queensland, Austrade, Ms Cheryl Stanilewicz,

Acting State Director, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Queensland Office, Mr Matthew Harrison,

Managing Director, Trade and Investment Queensland, Mr Rob Whiddon,

Deputy Under Treasurer, Economic and Structural Policy, Queensland Treasury and Trade, Mr Liam Gordon,

Chairman, Australia-Latin America Business Council, Mr Jose Blanco,

Vice Chairmen: Mr Thomas Schroeder (Qld) and Mr Marcelo Salas (NSW),

ALABC Directors, Mr Tim McLennan and Mr Paul Bradley,

Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (International), The University of Queensland, Dr Anna Ciccarelli,

Chairman, Queensland Overseas Foundation and Manger, Study Abroad and Overseas Exchange,
Griffith University, Ms Rebecca Hall,

Deputy CEO and Chief Operations Officer, Queensland Resources Council, Mr Greg Lane,

Executive Officer, Austmine, Mr Robert Trzebski,

ALABC members and guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Excelencias

Huespuedes Distinguidos,

Es un gran placer para mi de asistir a esta cena tan importante-con miembros de el Consejo Empresarial de Australia y America Latina, establecido para promover y estrechar las relaciones entre nuestros paises y regiones.

Muchimas Gracias por la invitation: y-en me papel como Gobernadora de Queensland, extendio un cordial saludo a todos los visitantes a nuestro Estado y su capital, Brisbane .

Estan en su casa!

I thank Council President Jose Blanco for his kind invitation to me to attend and speak at this important event as Guest of Honour. I am very pleased to be here this evening, for a number of compelling reasons. Naturally, my forty-year career at senior levels of Australian diplomacy is among them. In that respect, the prospect of being in the company today of so many who are also seized of the importance of these relationships was a temptation too strong to resist!

There are personal reasons too: my second posting as a diplomat - one that I actively sought - was to Mexico City, quite an adventure for a young Australian in the 1970s, but one that deepened my understanding, not only of that country and the other Central American countries for which the Australian Embassy in Mexico at the time had responsibility (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Panama) but stimulated my interest in Latin America more generally, an interest sustained and nourished through subsequent visits in other diplomatic roles, including as Australia's Ambassador for the Environment and to the UN - to Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Colombia and Uruguay. (On an even more personal note, Mexico City was also where our daughter, Sarah, ('Sarita') was born, so it holds a special place in our family's affections).

It is also the case that my frequent interaction with diplomats from Latin American countries, particularly in the UN, have been positive experiences - allowing for the occasional robust professional exchange - as have my meetings with Latin American Ambassadors who have called on me at Government House over the past five years (several of whom are here this evening, from Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, and most recently, Peru). I have found those conversations interesting and wide-ranging, though I may have put some Ambassadors on the spot last year when making clear our indisputable claims to a seat on the UN Security Council during Australia's intense but ultimately successful campaign. However, no Latin American diplomats were harmed in the process!

(And on a more serious note, I congratulate Chile on its election, last month to a seat on the Council. I know its presence and contribution will be much welcomed by Australia during the time we work together as non-permanent members).

Naturally, as a Governor appointed with the encouragement and promotion of Queensland's international relationships included prominently in my brief, I have a high degree of interest in the unmistakable upswing in Australia's relationships with Latin America, and Queensland's important role in that process.

While I will speak mainly about the development of the relationship over, roughly, the past two decades, I am very conscious that business people, diplomats and many others were toiling long before that to raise the profile of the relationship. And that those pioneers, including perhaps the first ALAB Council members in 1989, would have crawled over broken glass to have access to the level of attention to bilateral and regional links that we enjoy today.

As a former professional diplomat, I will offer a few observations about how the relationship has developed in that two-decade span. The first is that the relationship has strengthened despite the absence of the kind of 'natural' connections - for instance, a shared language (and I know you have talked about that today) and institutional legacy that can provide ready-made common ground. At the very least, this means that there exists real will to drive the relationship forward, whatever the challenges.

Then there is the argument that the relationship is disadvantaged by distance, often citing Australia's proximity to Asia by way of contrast. However, when a Queenslanders talks about 'proximity', we need to be wary. Some of our Asian 'neighbours' are well over nine hours direct flying time from Brisbane. So please accept the word of a well-travelled former diplomat: Australians travel long distances to get just about anywhere. The issue is not so much distance as a shortage of trans-Pacific air services to and from Latin America. Rectifying that would be a major boost for the relationship.

The perception that, in important sectors such as energy, minerals and agriculture, Australia and a number of Latin American countries are direct competitors in global markets, has also been suggested as an impediment to the relationship. It is true that we compete, but that traditional perspective on competition is outdated and limiting, distracting from opportunities for collaboration and cooperation. I will return to that point later.

With all of that said, the next logical question must be: if some of these factors have worked against closer relations in the past, where did the game-changer come from? And the answer is quite simple: it came from you, the business community.

From the Australian point of view, it is clear that our business community, indisputably led by the mining sector, has led the way, first through investment by large companies, and subsequently through the success of smaller enterprises, including Queensland firms in the mining equipment and services area, whose capacity for innovation and problem-solving means that they have found new and better ways of doing everything in mining, from education and training to dust suppression.

I think it is fair to say that governments in Australia have had to play 'catch-up' with the business community in this respect. But the important point is that there is a will to catch up. Queensland

governments laid the foundations, well over a decade ago, for the State's current market development activities in Latin America. It was also an early mover in reinforcing commercial relationships with government-to-government agreements and, more recently, by appointing a Trade Commissioner for South America based in Chile, and establishing representation in Brazil.

And I note also, all politics aside, that a Queensland Premier visited Brazil eight years before an Australian Prime Minister did.

Of course, there are now many more strands in our relationship with Latin America than business and government, important though both of these remain.

The thirty thousand students from Latin America studying in Australia represent another kind of connection, one that achieves academic and commercial outcomes but that also results in the emergence of thousands of goodwill ambassadors for this State when students return home. My only concern, also voiced by others, is that the students appear to be moving mostly in our direction - a challenge for governments and institutions involved.

While on the subject of education, I acknowledge also the contribution of our tertiary institutions to the relationship with Latin America. And I offer, as an excellent example, the fact that there are many guests here tonight who are freshly arrived from the University of Queensland's seventh annual Latin American Colloquium. I was disappointed that I could not join you - the program looked very interesting - but given its content and calibre of speakers, I am sure you had interesting and productive discussion.

I note also that several Australian Universities offer options for students to take subjects - even a Degree - that focus exclusively on Latin America, all of which adds valuable depth to our knowledge about one another.

I happily acknowledge also the role played by the first and second generation Latin American community in Australia, now estimated at around two hundred thousand. This is a significant number, even before it is multiplied by networks of family, friends and colleagues on both sides of the Pacific. The community brings many benefits, among which are the 'filling out' of the relationship through all-important people-to-people connections, and the steady erosion of long-outdated stereotypes we might still hold about one another.

I mentioned earlier the issue of competition versus collaboration in the economic relationship between Queensland and Latin America, and I return to it, as promised, because it provides clues to the full potential of the broader relationship.

Business communities in Australia and Latin America have already demonstrated that, by moving beyond the traditional idea of one another as competitors, they have succeeded in finding major areas of common interest. That process, from the Australian perspective, was triggered by our companies investing in Latin America which, while it certainly involves rational business decisions, also represents the acquisition by these companies of a stake in the region's future.

This encourages a different mindset, and Queensland companies were quick to understand that they, too, could be part of this picture by offering in Latin American markets the competitive goods and services they have successfully supplied to mining companies in Australia. This in turn has

brought a higher level of engagement in the economic relationship: who would have imagined, two decades ago, that as many as thirty Queensland companies would have offices in Chile alone?

Better still, their success has had and continues to have a 'demonstration effect' on companies in other sectors.

It has given the Latin American market a higher profile in Queensland, and the more our broader business community knows about this success story, the more interest there is likely to be in commercial opportunities for Queensland companies in Latin America, and vice versa.

I congratulate the Council and its partners in government and business on the important role they play in spreading the good news, though I also encourage them not to rest on their laurels. ("Cameron que se duerme se lo lleva la corriente!")

Having said, that I see little evidence of sleeping shrimps! There's a lot of good things happening in our relations - and mutual awareness of growing opportunities.

Overall, it is clear that, for the foreseeable future, the success of businesses in the mining sector will be the major commercial driver underpinning the relationship. The opportunities for Queensland companies continue to expand as interest from Latin America in the broader suite of mining technology and services available in Queensland increases. Queensland has world-class expertise in these areas - community engagement, health and safety and mine rehabilitation, among them - so there is no lack of opportunity to keep expanding our engagement in mining in Latin America, and it would be wise to continue to devote appropriate government and private sector resources to this goal.

The same applies to education. Latin American students, their families, and institutions providing scholarships clearly like what they see in the Australian education system, but there is no scope here either for sleeping shrimps or for resting on laurels. Attracting students is always a work in progress, requiring a consistent level of attention and resources.

But, in addition to continuing cooperation on the more established aspects of the relationship, all parties are well-served by an on-going, active dialogue about what else we are each 'good at'; about other areas in which there is real scope for mutually beneficial collaboration and cooperation, commercial or otherwise.

From the Queensland point of view, one strategy which I suspect is already in use, is to leverage reputations gained in the mining sector into other areas so that, for instance, Queensland's professionalism and expertise in sustainable mining might be converted, with a nudge from governments and peak industry bodies like the Council, into interest in the State's broader environmental credentials in other sectors.

It may also be a productive joint strategy to explore and identify prospects for productive institutional links between this State's highly developed research and development base and natural partners among institutions in Latin America, perhaps along the lines of the CSIRO's partnerships in Brazil.

And with good connections already in the agriculture sector, including, I know, between Queensland and Brazilian cattle producers, and conscious of the growing global preoccupation with food security

and of the level of capability we have in agribusiness, there is scope here, also, for developing new forms of cooperation in this important area.

And, moving further afield, let us not forget the benefits that cultural diplomacy can bring to the depth of the relationship. I understand that Ecuador is already ahead of the field with its art exhibition in Brisbane earlier this month, but I note also that many of our countries have in common rich and ancient indigenous cultures that might prove a natural starting point for a deeper cultural dialogue.

The agenda is large and broad ranging, and there are still substantial challenges in areas from air services to government regulation, but Australia and Latin America have already demonstrated, in APEC, in the Cairns Groups within the WTO, and within the UN system, that we have a great capacity to work closely and productively. That is also the case, more recently, in the G20, and I hardly need remind the Queensland Government that the G20 meetings in this State in 2014 offer unparalleled opportunities to impress very senior delegations from Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, with the help of our diplomatic colleagues from Canberra.

In a sense, I hope that, in working together to give the Australia-Latin American relationship more depth, strength and staying power, we are going back to the future, returning to the spirit of a time around the beginning of the twentieth century when Australia and Latin American countries were seen as natural southern hemisphere partners.

Perhaps we can take that thought back further still, to the treaties of Torsedillas and Zaragoza five hundred years ago, which sought to divide the whole world into areas of Spanish and Portuguese influence.

For the record, Queensland was mostly on the on the Spanish side of the line but, today, we happily embrace as international partners Latin American countries that straddled the same line, though on the other side of the globe. The line was meant to divide, but today it can be taken as a symbol of our common interests.

I congratulate the Council and its many partners and allies on their achievements to date, and I encourage them to greater efforts. I thank the sponsors of this dinner for supporting the Council so generously, and I wish everyone involved in our relationship with Latin America every success.

Thank you.