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Welcome Address

Malcolm McCusker

*Paper prepared for presentation at the “Mining, Agriculture And Development:
Bread from stones?” A joint conference conducted by the Crawford Fund and the Africa
Australia Research Forum, Perth, Western Australia, 26-27 August 2013*

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Welcome Address

His Excellency Malcolm McCusker AC CVO QC
Governor of Western Australia



Hon John Kerin AM, Chairman of the Crawford Fund;
Hon Dr Florence Chenoweth, Minister for Agriculture,
Liberia; His Excellency Festus Mogae, 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 clan of the

Noongar people, whose totem was the grey kangaroo. Each December they used
to hold an 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 as 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, and often error, had to be adapted by the settlers, to whom
dryland 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,
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, a little way north of Perth. I have been continuously involved in, and fascinated by, farming ever since. My property at Calingiri, also north of Perth, runs cattle and sheep, and currently has a crop still growing of 4500 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! 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 the distinguished guests at this conference 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 the University of Western Australia, 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 parts of the 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'. Dryland farming methods are of great importance to Australia and Africa, and each can learn from the other.

Although it is an Australian body, the Crawford Fund has as its motto 'For a Food Secure World', demonstrating 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, mainly because of 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 this country's very small area of naturally fertile lands, its low rainfall, and the poor quality of much of its soil. In Western Australia, much of

the land on the coast was only rendered productive after research establishing the need for trace elements and nutrients such as zinc, copper, potassium, molybdenum. At present, Western Australia, 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. Like all countries where the economy is heavily dependent on mineral exports, including a number of countries in Africa, 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. 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 Visitors Centre stands, will learn why it is dubbed 'The Wildflower State'.

Malcolm James McCusker AC CVO QC became the 31st Governor of Western Australia on July 1, 2011. Graduating with a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Western Australia, he was admitted to practice in 1961 and in 1982 he was appointed a Queen's Counsel. As a barrister, Mr McCusker is well known for his successful representation in a number of high profile cases, often pro bono, of wrongfully convicted persons. Among numerous roles, he served as Chairman of the Legal Aid Commission of WA from 1983 to 2011. Mr McCusker was made an Officer of the Order of Australia for his services to law and the community (2005) and a Companion of the Order of Australia for service to the people of Western Australia (2012); and he has received many other significant awards, both professional and for services to the State. Her Majesty The Queen appointed the Governor as a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (CVO) in October 2011. Mr McCusker is Patron of a number of community organisations including Landcare (WA). He has a strong interest in agriculture and agricultural research.