

## Introductory Remarks

John Stone

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to this, our twelfth Conference. As you all know, the Society had planned to hold a Conference here in Sydney in February this year devoted solely to the issue of Sovereignty – an issue which, I firmly believe, is taking on a more and more important significance in the minds of Australians. At almost the last moment, we were forced to cancel that Conference because we were given to understand that three of the major speakers, from the United States Congress, might not after all find it possible to attend. This was the first time in the Society's history that such a mishap had occurred, and to say that the Board was mortified would be an understatement.

Some time (and the Olympic Games!) now having elapsed, we have chosen to devote much of this Conference to that topic – Sovereignty – which was to have been the focus of that earlier, aborted gathering. And of course, last night, as was to be expected, our President, the Rt Hon Sir Harry Gibbs, launched our proceedings with his magisterial dinner address on *The Erosion of National Sovereignty*.

This morning we shall pursue that theme with four more papers – one which seeks to address the topic in its most general sense, and three others which focus upon more specific aspects of that generality. After lunch, we shall be privileged to hear two further papers which, although they are directed at the specific issue of Mandatory Sentencing, will also bear indirectly upon that same issue of Sovereignty. As I shall personally be chairing that post-luncheon session, perhaps it may be best if I say no more on that score.

The other issue which, since we last met, has commanded the attention of most members of this Society was, of course, the Referendum, on 6 November last year, on the republic issue (and the associated Referendum to insert a new Preamble into the Constitution). Later today Sir David Smith will open the batting on the republic matter with what I am sure will be some lusty despatches over the square leg boundary, and we shall continue tomorrow with a short paper on media bias during the referendum campaign, and a more extensive one by Malcolm Mackerras on what he has aptly called *The Inner Metropolitan Republic*.

On 1 January next Australians will celebrate the centenary of Federation of the six Australian Colonies, by Queen Victoria's proclamation of *The Constitution of Australia Act* on 1 January, 1901. In due course this Society will no doubt wish to mark that centenary by a Conference, next year, devoted to it. Meanwhile, however, this Conference tomorrow will conclude with what I know will be two splendid papers from two splendid people (notwithstanding that both are Professors, which these days is perhaps no longer a term to be conjured with). Geoffrey Blainey and David Flint will, each from his own perspective, look back upon this last near-century, and reflect upon the outstanding success of a Constitution upon which has been founded an outstandingly successful nation.

Before now turning to the first of our papers this morning, let me note that we had hoped to have this morning's session chaired by the Hon Andrew Thompson, MP, who among other distinctions happens to be the Chairman of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. Mr Thompson, however, has had to go to The Hague to attend the notorious gathering commencing there shortly as part of the follow-up to the laughable (if it were not so serious) *Tokyo Protocol* on so-called "greenhouse warming". I am particularly pleased that, at short notice, my old friend Senator Rod Kemp has agreed to chair the session in Mr Thompson's place. My pleasure in that regard is all the greater since, as some of you may remember, it was Senator Kemp who first spoke to the Society on the matter of United Nations interference in Australia's domestic affairs, back in 1994 in his still much-quoted paper.

I shall therefore now hand over to Senator Kemp.