

Introductory Remarks

John Stone

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Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome.

Last night we had from the Premier of Victoria an address on "The Crown and the States" which not only did great honour to this Society, but also – and more importantly – struck a firm and significant blow in the battle to uphold the role of the Crown in our constitutional arrangements.

On both counts we are indeed indebted to Mr Kennett, and I know that your Board of Management will take an early opportunity to express, on your behalf, our appreciation to him both for the manner in which he approached the task we had set him, and for the great deal of work which, clearly, he had obviously put into the preparation of his address.

If I may digress for one moment, I may also hazard the guess that, from a more purely partisan political viewpoint also, the Premier's address will be seen to do neither him nor his Government any harm politically – indeed, quite the contrary.

Later today the Society will hold its inaugural Annual General Meeting, and our President, Sir Harry Gibbs, will be reporting to you then on our activities over the past twelve months or so. Accordingly, I shall say nothing further about those matters at this time.

Today, we can look forward to the rest of our Conference team building upon the great innings played last night by Mr Kennett. To begin with, we shall continue the Republican debate with two papers dealing with particular aspects of it.

Then, as you know, we shall move to consider what we have called "the Aboriginal question" – or rather, two particular aspects of that enormous field for debate. I have read both the papers to be given under that head of the program, and I can promise you, Ladies and gentlemen, that you have a veritable feast before you.

After luncheon we shall have two papers on another topic of very great moment to all Australians at this juncture in our constitutional history – namely, the role of the High Court, both generally (in Peter Connolly's paper), and specifically in the Mabo judgment (in the paper by Mr S E K Hulme).

It would be tedious to go on to enumerate the full program in extenso. Suffice to say that the other five papers, including our President's address to us at Dinner this evening, will not suffer by comparison with their predecessors.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a good rule that introductory remarks of this kind are best kept short, and to the point; and particularly since I shall personally be chairing our first session this morning in any case, I think it is time to pay due heed to that good rule.

As noted earlier, that session will deal with two aspects of "The Crown v. The Republic". The first of our speakers under this topic will be a very distinguished – and very courageous – Australian, Dr Frank Knopfelmacher, whom it is now my privilege to introduce.