

Address to officially open the 2011 Nuffield International Conference

**His Excellency Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce
Governor of South Australia**

Friday 30th September 2011

Acknowledge:

- Mr Brendon Smart, Chairman of the 2011 International Conference
- Mr Terry Hehir, Chairman of Nuffield Australia
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for your invitation for me to be here today to open the 2011 triennial Nuffield International Conference.

Firstly, I would like to extend a warm South Australian welcome to those of you who have travelled from overseas or other parts of Australia. I hope that you are enjoying your time here, and will take the time to enjoy some of the fantastic fresh produce, sights and activities the state has to offer.

It is particularly pertinent that this, the third International Nuffield Conference to take place in Australia, is hosted by South Australia and Western Australia, as these were the two Australian states that selected the first Australian Nuffield Scholars in 1950.

It is a measure of the impact of Nuffield farming Scholarships on Australian rural practices and policies that both of these inaugural scholars went on to serve in the state and federal parliaments.

The Hon. Neil McNeill served for 20 years as a member of both houses of the Western Australian Parliament. The Hon. Bert Kelly served as a South Australian member of the federal parliament, and was one of Australia's most respected lobbyists on behalf of his rural constituency. In particular, his personal campaign for more open markets to benefit agricultural producers and exporters was immensely effective.

The Nuffield Agricultural Scholarships have come a long way since 1947, when Lord Nuffield established the first scholarships in an effort to cement ties between Commonwealth countries. I understand that those Scholarships were designed to encourage UK-based farmers to travel to other Commonwealth countries to investigate emerging agricultural trends. The Scholarships were also available to farmers from the Commonwealth countries to enable travel to the UK on a fully-funded six month exchange. Significantly, this was, and still is, a scholarship that did not demand tertiary qualifications but did require its recipients to demonstrate an enthusiasm for improved farming practices, and a willingness to share their ideas with other farmers.

When the first Australian Nuffield Farming Scholars were selected in the early 1950s, I'm advised that only two Australians were chosen each year, and they were almost certain to be men. In 2012, however, thanks to the support of

sponsors, commitment, and hard work, 21 Australian men and women will participate.

A glimpse of the number and range of the scholarships awarded for these Australians reinforces just how valuable the sponsors of Nuffield Australia believe the overseas learning experience is, and how positive they expect it to be for the future of Australian agriculture.

To see this in a wider context, over AU\$2 million is invested in these exchanges globally each year. Importantly, this represents an investment in agricultural education that would not otherwise occur. Over the years, this investment has slowly built an estimated global population of around 1500 Nuffield Agricultural Scholars.

The importance and impact of agricultural organisations such as Nuffield - whose focus is to foster and share information on techniques for more efficient and sustainable agricultural production and land use - cannot be overstated.

As we all know, the world is facing the very real possibility of critical food shortages. According to estimates, we need to double our agriculture production by 2050 in order to feed and clothe the projected world population.

This challenge has to be met despite scarce land resources and unprecedented water shortages. Diminishing oil reserves and the demand for biofuels further complicate the means to increased food production.

In short, new and innovative approaches to primary production are essential for global survival.

However, we need not despair. The resilience of humankind and our capacity to meet such challenges is remarkable. Over time, we have already taken significant steps in this field of knowledge. The global exchange of ideas, as characterised by the Nuffield ideal, has led to increases in primary production whilst using less inputs.

I was encouraged when I recently noted in the local agricultural paper, just two weeks ago that, in the face of the emerging threat of global warming, broad acre farmers in Western Australia are using exhaust gases from their tillage operations to add carbon to their soil. It is also with interest that I have learned that one of the 2012 Australian Nuffield Scholars will spend time overseas investigating practical applications of Soil Carbon Sequestration in agricultural environments.

The agricultural input that South Australians are most apprehensive about is water. Our nation is plagued by droughts and this state is the driest state of the continent.

Of course, we are not alone in this difficulty. Potable water scarcity is already a grim reality in many parts of the globe, with urban demand for water outpacing farm demand. By 2050, it is expected that cities will consume more than half of the world's available fresh water. However, what is encouraging is that efficient irrigation and the development of drought-tolerant crops are resulting in encouraging increases in production per litre of water used.

As you may be aware, it is in this area of dry-land farming and food security that South Australia offers world-leading expertise amongst its academics and practitioners. In particular, both the Waite and Roseworthy campuses of the University of Adelaide have significant concentration of expertise in sustainable agriculture, cereal breeding, plant and animal biotechnology, and dryland farming.

I have recently had the pleasure of meeting with the President of Tatarstan and the Iraqi Ambassador during their official visits to South Australia. Both representatives suggested that South Australian expertise in dryland agriculture would be of significant value within their countries, and foreshadowed partnerships in the near future. In particular, the Iraqi Ambassador expressed an interest in the prospect of a collaboration to produce export-ready dates in the state's Riverland using our modern irrigation techniques.

In this light, it is great to read that one of the 2012 Nuffield Australian scholarships has been awarded to learn international best practice in the

management of date palm plantations, and the marketing of premium date fruit.

Before concluding, I would like to take a moment to note the numerous corporate and public supporters of Nuffield Australia, whose contributions, I understand, have facilitated the recent growth in the number of scholarships for Australians. Similarly, events such as this conference don't occur without generous corporate sponsorship, and hard work by the organisers.

South Australia is delighted to be hosting today's Conference and its associated events. Nuffield is all about exchanging ideas internationally and this conference is that ideal in action. I wish the Conference every success and hope that its content inspires ideas and stimulates dialogue.

It is therefore with pleasure that I officially declare the 2011 Nuffield Triennial International Conference open.