

**EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF A PRESENTATION TO
ACT BRANCH OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA ASSOCIATION
TUESDAY 23 MARCH 2004**

Sam Wong

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Before I introduce our distinguished guest this morning, I would like to convey greetings from Peter McDermot, Chair of the ACT Branch of the Order of Australia Association. Unfortunately he cannot be with us today but he would like to send his greetings and apologies.

I especially welcome Mr Malcolm Hazell, Official Secretary to the Governor-General as our guest this morning.

It is really a great honour for me on behalf of the Association to welcome Malcolm this morning.

Malcolm Hazell is currently the Official Secretary to the Governor-General of Australia. He is the 9th person to hold that position since Federation. He is also the Secretary of the Order of Australia and the Secretary to the Australian Bravery Decorations Council.

Malcolm is a senior and highly experienced public servant for over 30 years, in the Australian Public Service. He has held various senior management positions and has held a policy advising position within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet since joining the Department in 1974. He worked in divisions dealing with parliamentary and government matters and international relations.

Of particular relevance to his new duties was a period as the Head of the Office of Ceremonial and Hospitality. He supervised many arrangements, including the celebrations of Australian Bicentenary in 1988 and was the Commonwealth Director of the Royal Visits to Australia. As a result of that, Malcolm received an honour as a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.

He was also the Head of the Cabinet Secretariat from 1996 to 1998. Before taking up his current position he was seconded from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to the position of Senior Government Adviser in the Prime Minister's Office.

Among other things, I did talk to some of Malcolm's colleagues – this is not on his piece of paper, this is only word of mouth – I was told, Malcolm is a great father and a great husband. He has two sons and he is always ready to assist projects involving education and youth. In particular, he also serves on the Board of Canberra Boys Grammar School and also is involved in community education activities with the Anglican Church. Among the colleagues' comments – he is a great boss and also a great colleague to give advice. He is always humorous and always for humanity. Hope that is all right Malcolm!

Therefore, without further ado, could I introduce to you, our guest of honour this morning, Mr Malcolm Hazell.

Malcolm Hazell

Thank you very much Sam. I am not sure that I can live up to those words.

To Bridget O’Keeffe, our convenor this morning, and ladies and gentlemen.

May I say what a distinct personal pleasure it is for me to be here. This is the first time that I have spoken to a group such as yours since I have had the privilege of being appointed to my office. So it is both with a little bit of fear and trepidation, but also with some excitement that I do so. I have been aware for some time of the work that the Order of Australia Association does and I was fortunate enough to travel with the Governor-General to the Annual Conference in Hobart in February this year and meet many of you and many others from around Australia, as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thought this morning that in a very relaxed way I would like to give you an overview of the Australian Honours System but with particular emphasis on the Order of Australia. That, of course, will be no news to many of you here who are distinguished recipients. For that, I congratulate you all and thank you for your contribution.

As Secretary to the Order, as Sam Wong said, I have the overseeing responsibility for the Honours Secretariat within Government House, headed by Amanda O’Rourke. I’m sure many of you will know Amanda. I will come to the actual administration of honours later in my talk.

But what I thought I’d like to do this morning, subject to your forbearance, is to give you some idea about the philosophy behind the Australian Honours System, to talk a little bit about the history – it is a fairly recent Order, in relative terms – and then to give you some details about how awards are made, and the framework within which we operate. Naturally I am pleased to answer your questions at the end. And if there is anything that you really want to get off your chest, to tell me about the Order, please feel free to do so.

Let us talk about the philosophy behind the system of Honours. I think that the general philosophy of any system of honours, which has been embodied in many countries, is to recognise the contribution of its citizens. There are well established and very comprehensive systems all over the world – in Australia, Canada, France, India and, of course, the United Kingdom. In some other countries, they are less formalised. But a common thread is the almost universal desire to publicly applaud human endeavour and, through this, to exemplify community values and aspirations.

In particular, the philosophy behind the Australian Honours System is to reward and recognise not by monetary or material benefit, but by national honour, those who have made outstanding contributions that benefit their communities and ultimately our country in some way.

The second and possibly most important purpose of the Order of Australia is that it serves to define, encourage and reinforce community standards, national aspirations and ideals by acknowledging actions and achievement and thereby identifying role models at all levels and in all spheres of the community.

An underlying principle of the Order of Australia is to recognise the quiet achievers in the community. Those who do not seek accolades for themselves, but are happy to serve the community without actively seeking public recognition. Through recommending awards for such people, the Council for the Order of Australia seeks to reinforce the importance of 'service above self' in the community. And I think if anything sums up what I want to say today it is that phrase 'service above self'.

Let me recount very briefly the history of the Australian Honours System. From our Federation to 1975, Australia used the British system of honours. The Australian system was instituted on 14 February 1975 when The Queen, on the recommendation of the then Australian Government, established the Order of Australia, the Australian Bravery Awards and the National Medal.

Australians at that time, of course, could still be nominated for all British awards including titles. Both systems initially ran concurrently. By the late 1980s, the Federal and all State and Territory Governments had ceased nominating under the British system.

In 1992, The Queen made it known that service by Australians should be recognised exclusively through the Australian Honours System. Shortly after, the British Awards statutes were amended to reflect this.

There remain certain awards within The Queen's personal gift, which may be bestowed on Australian citizens, for example, the Victoria Cross for Australia, the Order of the Garter, the Order of the Thistle, the Order of Merit and the Royal Victorian Order, which I am privileged to be a member of.

Let me talk now about the main elements of the Australian Honours System.

Since 1975, the Australian Honours System has developed into a comprehensive system of over 40 different award types, recognising a whole range of community service and endeavour. My colleagues have brought a montage, which I think is an excellent display, showing all of the awards that are available to us today. For example, they include long and diligent service in uniformed services, such as the Police, Fire and the Emergency Services - of course, recent awards relating to the bushfires in Canberra come to mind; there are awards for overseas service in civilian peacekeeping and humanitarian roles, for example, in Somalia, Mozambique, Bougainville and Rwanda; for military service in both peace and war, for example, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq; for Antarctic service; for gallantry and bravery by civilians, notably in Bali recently; and for public service and nursing. However, recognition of community members within the Honours System, other than for acts of bravery, is through the Order of Australia, which is and remains the pre-eminent award within the Australian Honours System.

The Order is an inclusive community based awards system which belongs to all Australians. It works on the premise of nominations by the community, for the community. The only requirement for nomination is that nominees be Australian citizens, either by birth or naturalisation. There is also provision for the recommendation by the Prime Minister of foreign citizens for an honorary award within the General Division at a level which he or she judges appropriate. Honorary appointments may also be made in the Military Division of the Order upon the recommendation of the Minister for Defence and approved as for all other awards by the Governor-General.

As you know, awards are announced twice a year on Australia Day and the day set aside in June to commemorate Her Majesty The Queen's birthday. From time to time, awards relating to specific endeavours are announced on anniversaries of days of remembrance, for example, the Bali Honours List.

There are, I think, three very distinctive features about our system which differentiate it from the previous system: first of all, there is the nomination process itself; secondly, the selection process; and, thirdly the administration of the system. I would like to say a little bit about each.

Any person in the community or any organisation or professional body can nominate someone for an award. Politicians may nominate in the same way as any other citizen. However, no politician selects those who are eventually honoured. That is a very important point. As I said before, nominees must be Australian citizens.

In terms of the selection, all nominations are considered by the Council for the Order of Australia, which is an independent advisory committee of 19, and which makes recommendations to the Governor-General. I will say a little bit more about the Council later on.

Let me turn to the administration of the system. The Governor-General is the Chancellor of the Order and also the Principal Companion, and is charged with its administration and authorises all awards, acting upon the advice of the Council. The Order of Australia operates under a guarantee of complete confidentiality to nominators and to referees, both as to the substance of the material they provide and as to the fact of their having provided it.

Let me now say something about the levels of the award within the Order of Australia. While endeavour may have been sustained over many years, in essence, membership of the Order of Australia is not an award for long service, but for outstanding service.

There are currently four levels in the Order. There were five, at the beginning. As you would know, there was originally a level of Knighthood and Dame. The last Knight appointed in the Order of Australia was Sir Gordon Jackson in 1983, but that level was removed on 3 March 1986. So no longer are there awards given at the Knight or Dame level within the Order of Australia.

The Companion in the Order of Australia, the AC, is for eminent achievement and merit of the highest degree in service to Australia or to humanity at large. A very, very prestigious award. I had the pleasure recently of accompanying the Governor-General to London where he invested Nancy Wake, the White Mouse, with her insignia as a Companion of the Order of Australia. It was an impressive ceremony.

The next level down is the Officer in the Order of Australia, the AO, for distinguished service of a high degree to Australia or to humanity at large. Then, a Member in the Order of Australia, the AM, for service to a particular locality or field of activity or to a particular group. And then, by far the largest category, the Medal of the Order of Australia, the OAM, for service worthy of particular recognition.

There are quotas. For example, excluding honorary appointments, in any calendar year, there are up to 30 Companions in the Order appointed, up to 125 as an Officer, 300 as a Member, but there is no quota for the Medal. These quotas were increased in 2003 and our brochures and literature are being updated to reflect this fact.

There is a subtle distinction that I would like to draw your attention to and that is the difference between the policy responsibility and the administration of the system. The development and review of honours policy is the responsibility of the government and takes place within the portfolio of the Prime Minister. It is also there that responsibility rests for the promotion of the honours system in the community and I am glad to see one of my former colleagues here today.

In terms of the management of the Order of Australia, let me say something about the Council itself. Very importantly, it is an independent body established under the Constitution of the Order. It meets twice a year and considers between 1,000 and 1,200 nominations at each meeting. I do not know if you have ever seen any of the documentation; I get delivered to me, between three and four big suitcases full of material. The members always complain to me that they have far too much reading material. It think it is worthwhile mentioning it to you because the research is extremely thorough, it takes an awful lot of time and effort, and it is very, very comprehensive.

There are 19 members appointed by the Governor-General as Chancellor of the Order: eight members nominated by the respective State and Territory Governments; eight drawn from a cross section of the community and appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister; and three ex-officio members - the Vice President of the Federal Executive Council, who represents the Federal Government, a representative from that area of the bureaucracy that formulates Honours policy, and the Chief of the Defence Force, General Cosgrove, currently.

The backgrounds, experience and fields from which Council members are drawn ensure a broad range of community representation. The current Chairman is the Honourable Sir James Gobbo, a former Governor of Victoria and, of course, a very distinguished person.

You might be interested to know that in the United Kingdom, the British Imperial System is currently under review. I read the transcript of some of the evidence recently where a great deal of attention has been given to the Australian system as a model, particularly the independence of the selection process. I do not pretend that everything about our system is perfect but clearly a number of people throughout the world think that our system works well.

Now, what does the Council do? It is important to note that the Council itself does not generate nominations. They only consider nominations put before it which have been researched and processed by the Honours Secretariat which works at Government House. Council decides on the level of the Award to be offered. Based on their own knowledge, gained through extensive community involvement, and taking into account the views of referees, Council members assess the significance and effect of the service in the community. In cases where it is felt that more information is required about a nomination, Council will ask that the nomination be deferred for reconsideration at a future meeting.

In making recommendations for Awards, the Council has regard to the criteria of the four levels of awards set out in the Constitution of the Order, and to which I referred very generally a moment ago. It assesses individual nominations against the known contributions of others in the same field or category, seeking to satisfy itself that the person concerned has either demonstrated achievement at a high level or made a contribution over and above what might be expected through paid employment, or whose voluntary contribution to the community has been particularly significant.

The Honours Secretariat within my Office was established as a permanent body in 1976. Its role is to support the Governor-General in the independent administration of the honours system and to assist the Council for the Order of Australia by verifying the details of service provided in nominations, by undertaking very comprehensive research and analysis prior to presentation to Council, presenting all the nominations to Council, arranging for the manufacture and continuous supply of each medal – and I can tell you that is a huge job – production of the warrants – and that is a huge job too because I have to sign every one of them – maintaining a register of all Honours and Awards conferred within the Australian System, and extensive community liaison through contact with nominators, referees and by dealing with wide ranging enquiries about the operation of the Order.

I might say that while there is widespread public interest about the operation of the Order, there is regrettably ignorance. Hopefully, through forums such as these, we can rectify this - I am relying on you!

I have been asked to say a little bit about the ownership of insignia. They are of course quite beautiful. I was asked today to bring along the insignia of my Office, the Secretary's Badge. The reason you know it is the Secretary's Badge is that it has crossed quills.

This is one of three unique insignia. There is the Sovereign's Badge which The Queen wears, there is the Chancellor's Badge, which the Governor-General wears and you will see him at any investiture wearing his Badge, and this is the Secretary's Badge. And to the best of my knowledge, these are the only three unique insignia. This was, of course, designed by Stuart Devlin as all of the original medals were. It is a beautiful piece of work.

Under the Constitution of the Order, insignia remain the property of the Order. However, in reality, we never ask that they be returned following the death of a recipient. It can be left to the family to decide what they would like to do with it, for example, to bequeath it to their children. Others actually quite like their awards buried with them.

However, I would say this. The Council frowns very much on any action that could be seen to devalue the meaning of the Award, and actively discourages people from selling them. Return is requested when you are upgraded in the same Division; not so happily when an award might be cancelled which happens infrequently but it nevertheless happens, or on resignation from the Order - very rare, not more than four in 29 years, where somebody has, I presume, for their own good reason, decided to resign.

Let me just talk now about the nomination process. My colleagues tell me that on each of the tables there are folders with quite detailed information brochures inside them. So what I am referring to is actually very much in there.

In the speech to the meeting in Hobart the Governor-General made a number of very important suggestions about how we can better publicise the Order. He said at that time that he really hoped that everybody would get behind the Order and make nominations. He also suggested that local councils throughout Australia might display in their offices the various levels in the Order, with information about how to make nominations. In other words, to get information out into the community about how easy it is to make a nomination and how important it is that citizens are nominated because, unless they are nominated by someone, they cannot be considered for an Award. Because, as I said earlier, the Council itself does not make nominations; it only considers nominations put before it.

Let me say something about the nomination process. The nomination forms and guidelines are available from my Office, the Honours Secretariat at Government House Canberra. You can also ring us. We are always very happy to receive your phone calls. You can leave the name and address details on a 24 hour toll free nomination request answering service. This service is listed in all the phone books throughout Australia and is displayed on all documentation distributed about Honours to the community. Or, if you are so inclined, you can get onto the internet and download it from the website. The website is www.itsanhonour.gov.au.

Information and nomination forms are also available from politicians' offices, Federal Members and Senators, from State MPs electorate offices, State Premiers' Departments and local government offices. We write the guidelines in six languages, other than English - Italian, Polish, Vietnamese, Greek, Croatian, and traditional Chinese.

Who may nominate? Any individual or organisation may nominate an Australian citizen for an Award in the Order of Australia to recognise that person's service or achievements. Self-nominations however should not be made. Nor is it appropriate to ask someone else to nominate you. All Honours matters are strictly confidential and nominees should not know that they have been nominated. I cannot stress that to people, enough. This avoids embarrassment or disappointment should the Council for the Order not recommend an award. And that happens, clearly.

In preparing a nomination it is very wise to give as much detail as possible. Full name and address is important so that the correct person is identified when the Secretariat goes out seeking referee comment. There are many John Smiths in the community. It is also important so that the nominee can be contacted in the event that the award is recommended.

If a nominee were born outside Australia, it is particularly important to provide whatever information is available to enable the Secretariat to verify that the person is an Australian citizen. For example, any known name changes, anglicised version of names, maiden name if appropriate, date of arrival, date and place of birth, and date and place of naturalisation, if it is known. I think it is also wise to spend time setting out the reasons why you think the nominee's service and achievements are outstanding and worthy of recognition. If you do not tell us, we will never know. And the best people to tell us are the people like yourselves and others in the community who know these people well and can speak from the heart.

As a guide, some matters for consideration are set out in the nomination form to help you explain why you think the person you are nominating stands out from all others. A list of appointments held by the nominee is helpful but may not necessarily be sufficient for Council to recommend an award. There are of course many other suggestions and I do not think I will go into them here.

I would just like to say something about the type of service that is recognised. The types of services recognised are as varied as human endeavour itself. Service that could be considered above and beyond what others might be doing in the same field or in volunteer effort. Examples of the different types of service include the following: aged care, local government service, cultural affairs, education, ex-service welfare, Australia and overseas business relations, developing new trading links, assistance in areas such as resettlement programs and interpreter services. There is a whole range of them; they are endless. It is absolutely inspiring to see the activities that many people are involved in.

In their consideration, the Council will consider the eminence, degree, and value of the contribution rather than merely the length of time over which the service is carried out. Length of time is not, as I said earlier, the primary focus. The concept of merit embodied in the criteria implies that the individuals recognised should stand

out from others who may also have made a valuable contribution. In some cases, this endeavour may have been sustained over many years but, in essence, membership of the Order is not an award for long service but for outstanding service.

The Council assesses the statements provided by the nominator and referees to determine if the community ie their peers, considers the person has demonstrated achievement at a high level or has made a contribution over and above what might be expected through paid employment or whose voluntary contribution to the community has been particularly significant.

The usual time required to research and prepare a nomination, from the time it is received to when it is finally presented to the Council, can be about 12 months and can even take up to 18 months. In the case of the more senior awards it is usually lengthy. At the end of the process, following Council's consideration of the nomination, all nominators are advised of the outcome of the decision. Notification is sent to nominators about one week before the Honours List is announced. The names of the successful nominees are published twice a year on Australia Day, 26 January and on the day set aside in June to officially commemorate Her Majesty The Queen's birthday. All Honours material, including the nomination details, is strictly confidential and only used to assist Council in its consideration. Nominees should not be approached for information nor advised of the nomination at any stage.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope this has given you an overview of the Australian Honours System. I think one or two points of emphasis in conclusion are relevant, if I may.

Any Australian citizen can be nominated and we would really like everybody to focus on that and to nominate people they think worthy of recognition. The underlying principle is the recognition of the quiet achievers; those who are happy to serve the community without actively seeking public recognition – “service above self”. Through recommending awards, the Council seeks to reinforce the importance of this concept of ‘service above self’ in the community.

Thank you very much. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

