

Lapérouse Day

23 February 1998

Mrs Robyn Kruk, Director General of the National Parks and Wildlife Service,

The Honorable Peter Collins MP, Leader of the Opposition,

Councillor Ken Finn, Mayor of Randwick,

Councillor Chris Bastic, President of the Friends of the Lapérouse Museum,

Councillor Charles Matthews,

Mr John Mac Coll, délégué au Conseil Supérieur des Français de l'Etranger,

Mr Claude Merle, cultural counsellor representing the French Ambassador in Australia,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends, chers amis,

This is a very special occasion for me. I have indeed been to this place on many occasions since I arrived in Sydney seven months ago, and only yesterday for the last time, but this is my first official participation in the now traditional Lapérouse Day. Today is also a special day for all of us since we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the

Museum which has been established on the very site where the Lapérouse's expedition arrived in Australia.

Anniversaries or commemorations provide good occasions for reflection. As far as Lapérouse Day is concerned, reflection on the significance of this place, reflection on the past ten years, reflection on the future.

For ten years now, representatives of the French and Australian communities have gathered to honor in a solemn fashion the memory of the great navigator who spent six weeks in Botany Bay before disappearing for ever, in a tragic shipwreck. Of course, even before the establishment of Laperouse Day, geography had recorded Lapérouse's presence in this area of Sydney : the very name of this suburb, Frenchmen's Beach, Astrolabe Cove. There were also the Lapérouse Monument and the grave of Father Receveur, erected in 1828 and maintained ever since through subsidies of the French government. As we can notice on this monument, many French ships coming to Sydney over the years have also paid tribute to Lapérouse's memory. This monument has also been for a long time a rallying point for our ex servicemen and veterans.

However, it was at the time of the Australian Bicentenary, ten years ago, that our communities fully realised the historical significance of this site and decided that the commemoration of

Lapérouse could go a step further and become a permanent feature. This is the origin of the Lapérouse Day which we are celebrating today and of the Lapérouse Museum which stands nearby. I take this opportunity to congratulate and express my warmest thanks to all those, from the Australian and the French side, individuals and business companies, who participated in this process, by giving their time, their expertise, their artefacts and the financial means needed to create the museum. I know that many of them are here today. Some of them however are not with us anymore and we should have a special thought for them, in particular for the late Pierre Roussel who was an extraordinary driving force without whom the museum would probably not exist.

One could wonder why the past history is so important for our communities. I can only speak of course for the French community living in Australia. I am sure that our community is proud that France participated in the making of Australian history and left on Australian soil important historical heritage. Beyond that, and certainly even more important, they are proud and happy that the friendly encounters between Lapérouse's crew and Captain Philip's as well as with the local indigenous people was the beginning of a long friendly relationship between France and Australia. Indeed, Lapérouse followed the instructions he had received from the king himself before departing and which said : « May your arrival be remembered by the good you will do, may there be regrets at your departure . You will

achieve much if humanity and kindness pervade all your dealings with people. »

Friendship, this is what the Lapérouse Museum is all about. Let me quote again, this time from the National Parks and Wildlife service booklet introducing the museum : « In keeping with the spirit of cooperation required to create it, this museum also seeks to perpetuate and further strengthen the long-lasting ties between Australia and France ». This is exactly what the early promoters had in mind when they decided to present the museum to the New South Wales government on that day of 23rd February 1988, in the presence of the Hon. Bob Carr, then Minister for Environment and Planning, and the late André Giraud, then Minister for Defence and president of the French Committee for the Australian Bicentenary.

It is also this spirit of cooperation and friendship that should inspire our on-going relationship as we start reflecting upon the future of the museum. After ten years of operation, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has decided to undertake the refurbishment and redevelopment of the museum. It is indeed a good thing that a museum, like any institution, draws the lessons from its record, which may be a mix of achievements and failures, so as to reach an even higher standard.

However, it is frequently the case that a change is likely to create anxiety or even disapproval. We all had similar experiences in our personal or professional life, didn't we? As far as the Lapérouse Museum is concerned, I have been assured that every decision will be made with due consideration of all stakeholders' views so that a consensus can be reached on a future course. I am happy to note that the steering committee which has been created to discuss and review the proposed changes will meet shortly. Since I have been invited to seat on the committee, I shall be most happy, in my capacity of Consul General, to represent the French community.

Even before this process starts, I can say that the French community will be watching very closely the coming developments, to make sure that any change in the museum will be made in accordance with the historical significance of the site.

Today, as we celebrate Lapérouse Day and the 10th anniversary of the museum, I am confident that all parties involved will uphold the spirit of friendship required to create the museum. I do hope that the 20th anniversary of Lapérouse Day, in ten years time, will see an even better museum, fully recognised by all communities involved and attracting a large public paying homage both to our history and to our friendship.

Thank you.