

## **Speech by Mayor Logan K Howlett, JP**

### **City of Cockburn**

#### **Official Opening of the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Wetlands Conference**

**2 February 2016**

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here on the occasion of the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Wetland Management Conference in celebration of World Wetlands Day, which commemorates the signing of the Convention on Wetlands in the Iranian city of Ramsar on 2 February 1971.

The 'Welcome to Country' presented by the Reverend Sealin Garlett has provided the backdrop for the land where we meet on today and the changing world we live in. It is one that tests our resolve, generates tensions and competing priorities and ultimately leads to decisions that impact, both good and bad on those who will follow in our footsteps.

I acknowledge the Wadjuk People of the Nyungar Nation and pay respects to their Elders both past and present and I extend that respect to Indigenous Australians who are with us today.

The Ramsar theme for 2016 of "Wetlands for our Future Sustainable Livelihoods" will unfold in the papers to be delivered today by a range of informed, passionate and dedicated people who have either chosen a career in the environmental field or who pursue their interests in a volunteering capacity – in some cases it is both – congratulations go to each and every one of you as true leaders in our community.

The primary objective of this Conference is to provide an annual opportunity for the exchange of information and ideas between wetland practitioners with a focus on the latest developments about how to effectively manage and restore wetlands.

The Conference is intended to bring together community conservation volunteers, landowners, educators, local and State Government officers and private sector environmental officers involved with wetland management.

The conference has attracted approximately 160 delegates per annum for the past 11 years or almost 2,000 delegates since its inception.

Some of you may have been to every conference – show of hands if you have. That's amazing.

Just think back to where you were in terms of your career and/or volunteering around the early part of the millennium?

The City of Cockburn is a proud sponsor of this event and along with other sponsors and supporters and the assistance of volunteers it has grown in stature, attendance numbers and importantly, knowledge sharing and networking when like-minded people come together with a common cause.

I have a personal connection with this locality going back to 1972 when together with my wife Pat we chose to buy a home nearby allowing us to raise our family on the doorstep of the banksia woodlands and wetlands that surround us today.

At that time kangaroos could still be found in the bushland or at the lake's edge, turtles could move freely and safely to and from the lake areas, you could sit down on a log and listen to the birds twirping away, go for long walks without ever seeing another person; all the while taking in the beauty and tranquillity of a place we can only dream about today.

Our grandchildren travel in the same footprints as our children once did. They often ask why there is so much noise from cars and trucks and why the roads can't be closed and let things return to times past.

Indeed, the Aboriginal people travelled this area for over 40,000 years, moving with the seasons, respecting the land, passing stories down through the generations and living in harmony according to their Elders guidance and direction. This locality is well known for its sacred Aboriginal sites and rich heritage.

Later, the lakes edge and nearby bushland were home to several veterans who had returned from the world war suffering shellshock – theirs' was an escape from the generation of noise by society.

Then there was the coming and going of the Chinese market gardeners around the 1890's through to 1902 followed by European settlement shortly thereafter as those early pioneers eked out a living from growing vegetables and running small dairies.

In more recent times the banksia woodlands and wetlands have reverted back to times past to some extent with weed control, the removal of introduced species, revegetation projects, education programs etc. being developed and implemented from the Centre in partnership with the City of Cockburn and other stakeholders, including an amazing volunteer base.

However we must all remain vigilant in our communities in terms of threats, perceived and real to our natural environment – the challenge is there for all of us – it is how we go about it that is important.

I look forward to today's proceedings and the opportunity to be informed by the speakers, to engage in conversation with delegates and to increase my knowledge and awareness of the environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure in formally declaring open the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual WA Wetland Management Conference 2016.

Thank you.