



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

CIVIC RECEPTION SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

Thursday 11 December 2025

Acknowledgments

Councillor Dennis Heslin, Mayor, **Councillors** and **Tony Doyle**, Chief Executive Officer, Southern Grampians Shire Council

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this building stands – the Gunditjmara people – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

Thank you to Aunty Claudette Lovett for the warm welcome.

It is a pleasure to join you here this evening.

These visits have been a longstanding responsibility of Governors of Victoria.

It can be interesting to read through the archives to see how they have transformed over time.

I would like to point to one particular occasion, back in 1912, when Governor Sir John Fuller toured this region and attended a civic reception, just as we are doing tonight.

In his address, as reported in the *Hamilton Spectator*, Sir John made two points that are worth reflecting on.

Firstly, he stated that it was “part of the duty of a Governor to see as much of the country and people as [they] could.”

That remains true today – without speaking to Victorians where they live, one cannot fully appreciate the depth and breadth of all that is happening in our State.

The other point that Sir John made that day also rings true over a century later.

He said: "...the State made Melbourne, and not Melbourne the State..."

Over many decades, the contributions of our regions have shaped Victoria into what it is today – a fact sometimes underappreciated by those living in metropolitan areas.

Before European settlement, there was a strong First people's occupation of these lands.

After European settlement, the State was built on initial pastoral prosperity which is sustained to this day by our agricultural strength in regions like this.

Regional Victorians have created vibrant institutions that have added much to our State's rich cultural fabric – as is evident in this building.

And regional Victoria has always led the way in another one of our State's great assets – our depth of volunteer spirit – again, evidenced by many organisations represented here tonight.

Robust industries, rich cultures and strong communities – these are all things I have experienced firsthand during my time here.

Behind all these assets, it is really the people who are the driving force.

Earlier this year, I met one of this Shire's residents at Government House for the 2025 Red Cross Victoria Awards.

Louise Byrne, a Southern Grampians local, received a Victorian Service Award in recognition of her role in the Red Cross Unit based in the locality of Brit Brit.

For 65 years, she has volunteered her time at market day stalls, raffles, fashion parades, and clearing sales, along with organising many successful local open garden days.

It is an incredible contribution – but no doubt just one of many stories that have defined this community over many years.

Though we host numerous receptions and award ceremonies at Government House, if that's all Governors did, they would only witness a small snapshot of our State's identity.

That's why these regional visits are one of the great privileges of this role, giving me the opportunity to get a better sense of the nature of communities like this one.

There are, of course, challenges that are unique to regional Victoria – such as increased exposure to natural disasters and the barriers of distance – and on tour these issues become clearer.

And though we rightfully praise the strength of community spirit and resilience in our regions, we should not rely on these strengths alone in addressing such challenges – as you cannot begin to find solutions without having solid foundations to build on.

Across the Southern Grampians, I have seen firsthand those foundations that are integral to building better futures together:

Stable economies and dynamic businesses, bold cultural and tourism offerings, welcoming and inclusive communities, and an entrenched volunteer spirit.

My overwhelming impression of this Shire is that these fundamentals are strong, and I thank the Council for giving their time to provide these insights.

All of this is the result of the efforts of people like yourselves.

In that spirit, I look forward to speaking with you and hearing about your experiences and ideas for the future.

Thank you.