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**FAREWELL LECTURE**
**JULY 2009 – LISMORE CAMPUS**

INTRODUCTION

I STARTED AT SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY AS ITS THIRD VICE-CHANCELLOR NEARLY 5 YEARS AGO, AT THE END OF AUGUST 2004. IT TOOK HARDLY ANY TIME AT ALL TO REALISE THAT BEING THE VICE-CHANCELLOR OF A UNIVERSITY IS ONE OF THE BEST JOBS ON EARTH.

YOU GET TO DEAL WITH SOME OF THE BRIGHTEST AND BEST MINDS IN THE COUNTRY. YOU GET TO PROVIDE THE WORLD'S MOST VALUABLE COMMODITY – AN EDUCATION – TO THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS ON CAMPUS AND ACROSS THE GLOBE. YOU GET TO ENGAGE WITH A WIDE RANGE OF PEOPLE WHO WANT TO SUPPORT THE UNIVERSITY OR SEEK ITS SUPPORT FOR THEIR ACTIVITIES. YOU GET TO BUILD A FEW BUILDINGS – OR MORE RARELY, BUT TRUE IN MY CASE, YOU GET TO START A COMPLETELY NEW CAMPUS: AT THE GOLD COAST IN QUEENSLAND. YOU GET TO DEAL WITH THE FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS, WHO PAY THE MONEY (FEDERAL), ENACT OUR LEGISLATION (NSW) OR OVERSEE OUR ONSHORE INTERNATIONAL OFFERINGS (NSW, QLD AND WA).

NO DAY IS THE SAME AS THE ONE BEFORE. NOR IS IT EVER AS IT WAS PLANNED TO BE. BUT IT IS GREAT FUN; AND YOU EVEN GET PAID TO DO IT!

A VISION FOR OUR REGION

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ENTHUSIASTIC AT THE IMPORTANT ROLE THAT A UNIVERSITY CAN PLAY IN ITS REGION. BUT EVERY REGION IN AUSTRALIA IS

DIFFERENT, SO THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IS LIKELY TO BE DIFFERENT TOO. IT HAS BEEN IN OTHER PLACES I'VE WORKED.

I HAVE HELD SENIOR APPOINTMENTS AT FOUR UNIVERSITIES. IN THE MID 1980S I WAS AT WHAT IS NOW CENTRAL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY. AT THAT TIME, AS CAPRICORNIA INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION IT WAS AN INSTITUTION FOCUSSED MAINLY ON UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES, MUCH AS NORTHERN RIVERS CAE WAS AT THAT TIME. ITS ROLE WAS TO PREPARE THE PROFESSIONALS – THE TEACHERS, THE ENGINEERS, THE ACCOUNTANTS AND THE NURSES (NEW ENTRANTS IN TO HIGHER EDUCATION) – WHO WOULD SUPPORT THE MINING AND FARMING BUSINESSES IN THE RELATIVELY ISOLATED REGION. IT WAS A SMALL OPERATION AND NEEDED AN EXTENSIVE PROGRAM OF DISTANCE EDUCATION TO ENSURE IT COULD RECRUIT ENOUGH STUDENTS.

BUT JUST BEFORE I LEFT ROCKHAMPTON THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT LIFTED THE PROHIBITION ON AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTIONS CHARGING OVERSEAS STUDENTS A FEE TO UNDERTAKE A DEGREE IN AUSTRALIA. THAT STARTED WHAT IS NOW OUR THIRD LARGEST EXPORT INDUSTRY, AFTER COAL AND IRON ORE. IT ALSO ENABLED SOME REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS, ESPECIALLY CQ UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT, TO EXPAND INTO THE CAPITAL CITIES AND ESTABLISH NEW CAMPUSES WHICH WERE ONLY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS. WITH ALL ITS RISKS, THOSE UNIVERSITIES ARE NOW EITHER VERY SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS OR FRAGILE BUSINESSES FOREVER SUBJECT TO PANIC ATTACKS – SUCH AS THE CURRENT ISSUE OF STUDENT SAFETY, OR SARS OR A CHANGE IN THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INWARD MIGRATION. MAYBE ONLY TIME WILL TELL WHICH AND WHETHER THE UNIVERSITY'S HOME REGION REALLY BENEFITS IN THE LONG RUN.

I NEXT WENT TO FOOTSCRAY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, AS ITS DEPUTY DIRECTOR IN THE LATE 1980S. THIS WAS THE TIME OF FRENZIED

AMALGAMATIONS UNDER THE DAWKINS REFORMS AND F.I.T. WAS SOON SUBSUMED INTO WHAT IS NOW VICTORIA UNIVERSITY IN THE WESTERN SUBURBS OF MELBOURNE. MELBOURNE'S WEST, AS IN SYDNEY, IS ITS MANUFACTURING HEARTLAND – OR RUST-BELT AS IT WAS AT THE TIME. THE UNIVERSITY'S ROLE WAS VERY MUCH AIMED AT TRAINING THE SKILLED PEOPLE NEEDED TO RENEW THESE INDUSTRIES OR ESTABLISH NEW ONES – SUCH AS A MAJOR TRANSPORT LOGISTICS AND STORAGE INDUSTRY. SO THE UNIVERSITY HAD A LARGE TAFE COMPONENT, A BROAD UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM PLUS MANY POSTGRADUATE UPGRADING COURSES, AND A PHD PROGRAM WHICH ENCOURAGED PROJECTS WITH LOCAL INDUSTRY. AT THE TIME I LEFT THE UNIVERSITY HAD 55,000 STUDENTS, MORE THAN ANY OTHER TERTIARY INSTITUTION, SPREAD OVER 14 CAMPUSES; INDEED, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO DRIVE ANYWHERE IN MELBOURNE FROM FLINDERS STREET TO THE FAR OUTER-WEST SUBURB OF MELTON WITHOUT SEEING A VU CAMPUS.

MY NEXT FORAY WAS BACK TO QUEENSLAND IN THE ROLE OF THE FOUNDATION DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST. THE UNIVERSITY HAD TAKEN ITS FIRST STUDENTS FOUR YEARS EARLIER, IN 1996, AND SO WAS QUITE SMALL AND RESIDENT ON A SINGLE NEW CAMPUS. FOR ME IT WAS A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO DRAW ON MY VU EXPERIENCE AS A DVC AND DECLARE THAT THE THINGS I LIKED DOING WERE WHAT DVCS DID, AND THE OTHER STUFF WAS NOT; A CASE OF DESIGN YOUR OWN PORTFOLIO.

ALTHOUGH SMALL IN SIZE BUT RICH IN LAND, THE UNIVERSITY HAD ALREADY DETERMINED THAT IT WANTED TO BE A DRIVER OF NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ON THE SUNSHINE COAST. THE PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES OF TOURISM, CONSTRUCTION AND RETAILING DEFINED THE SUNSHINE COAST (THIS WAS BEFORE NAMBOUR WAS IDENTIFIED AS A MAJOR SOURCE OF FEDERAL POLITICIANS). THE ECONOMY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST WAS LIMITED AND FRAGILE, AND THE UNIVERSITY SET ABOUT THE

DEVELOPMENT TASK IN A BOLD WAY. IT BORROWED MONEY, PERSUADED THE STATE GOVERNMENT TO CONTRIBUTE AND CONSTRUCTED A LARGE BUILDING CALLED THE "INNOVATION CENTRE". AN OVERSEAS DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE WAS RECRUITED AND THE PROCESS OF THE INCUBATION OF NEW BUSINESSES BEGAN.

IN ITS SEVEN YEARS OF GROWTH THE CENTRE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL, GENERATING MORE THAN 100 HIGH LEVEL JOBS IN THESE BUSINESSES. AND IMPORTANTLY, PROVIDING THE UNIVERSITY'S STUDENTS WITH WORK EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES WHEN THEY GRADUATE. THE UNIVERSITY HAS ALSO USED THE CENTRE AS A TEACHING SITE FOR ITS CORE UNIT IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP. MOST RECENTLY THE INNOVATION CENTRE HAS OPENED ITS 'BUSINESS ACCELERATOR', WHERE SUCCESSFULLY INCUBATED SMALL BUSINESSES CAN GET THE HELP, THE SPACE AND THE ENVIRONMENT TO ENABLE THEM TO EXPAND. WITHOUT CHANGING LOCATIONS.

IMPORTANTLY, THE SUPPORT OF THE QUEENSLAND STATE GOVERNMENT AND THE LARGEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY WERE CRITICAL AT THE EARLY STAGES OF THE INNOVATION CENTRE. BUT IT WAS THE UNIVERSITY WHICH DID THE DRIVING, WALKED THE TALK, CONVINCED THE SCEPTICS AND TOOK THE RISKS.

NOT EVERYONE THINKS THAT'S THE ROLE OF A UNIVERSITY, AND IN A MAJOR METROPOLITAN CENTRE OR CAPITAL CITY IT MIGHT NOT NEED TO BE. BUT I RECKON THAT THE NON-METROPOLITAN REGIONS NEED TO GET ALL THE BENEFITS FROM THEIR UNIVERSITY THAT THEY CAN. AND I'M SEEING SIGNS THAT THE NSW STATE GOVERNMENT IS BEGINNING TO REALISE WHAT VICTORIA AND QUEENSLAND HAVE LONG KNOWN – THAT A UNIVERSITY IS AN ASSET THAT GIVES HIGH RETURNS ON THE INVESTMENTS MADE IN IT.

SO WHAT ARE SOME OF THESE RETURNS FOR A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY LIKE SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY?

CLEARLY ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT IN THE REGION IS THE FIRST AND FOREMOST. THERE IS LOTS OF EVIDENCE TO SHOW THAT STUDENTS WHO, TO USE A PHRASE, COME FROM THE BUSH AND TRAIN IN THE BUSH, THENSTAY IN THE BUSH. IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION, FOR EXAMPLE, REGIONAL STUDENTS ALMOST INVARIABLY STUDY AT THEIR LOCAL UNIVERSITY, BECAUSE THEY CAN. AND THEY KNOW THEY WILL GRADUATE WITH QUALIFICATIONS AND EARNING POWER EQUAL TO ANY OTHERS. THE SAME IS TRUE FOR ACCOUNTANTS AND NURSES AND MANY OTHER PROFESSIONAL FIELDS. AND IN SOME SPECIALIST AREAS, SUCH AS PSYCHOLOGY, REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES CAN ATTRACT STUDENTS FROM THE CITIES, WITH A POSSIBILITY THAT AFTER GRADUATING THEY WILL REMAIN IN THEIR NEW ENVIRONMENT. AND IN MY VIEW A TRULY RURAL AND REGIONAL MEDICAL SCHOOL WOULD DO THE SAME. WHERE THERE IS NO PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM (E.G. ENGINEERING IN NSW) STUDENTS HAVE TO LEAVE THE REGION AND RARELY RETURN.

AS AN ASIDE, THIS GIVES ME A CHANCE TO MENTION SOMETHING ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN DEMOGRAPHY WHICH CONCERNS ME GREATLY. A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO I WAS IN THE UNITED STATES WHEN THEY RELEASED THEIR 2005 CENSUS DATA. IT LISTED THEIR MAJOR CITIES BY POPULATION. SO THERE WAS NEW YORK WITH ITS 8.5 MILLION PEOPLE; THEN LA - A CITY SMALLER THAN SYDNEY ; AND MELBOURNE WOULD BE THIRD, LARGER THAN CHIGAGO OR HOUSTON. FOR THE US AS A WHOLE, 75% OF AMERICANS LIVE IN COMMUNITIES OF LESS THAN 100,000 PEOPLE. IN AUSTRALIA, 75% OF US LIVE IN COMMUNITIES LARGER THAN 100,000.

OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS SYDNEY IS GOING TO GROW AT 1.2% PER YEAR, COMPARED TO 0.9% FOR THE REST OF NSW. IN VICTORIA THE DIFFERENTIAL IS WORSE – MELBOURNE GROWING AT 1.6% ANNUALLY, THE REST OF

VICTORIA AT ONLY 0.8%. ONLY IN QUEENSLAND IS THE GROWTH OF THE CAPITAL, 2.1% FOR BRISBANE , THE SAME AS THE REST OF THE STATE.

HOW MUCH LONGER CAN WE CONTINUE TO GROW OUR CITIES, WITH THEIR MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIREMENTS? WHY CAN'T WE OPEN OUR MINDS TO THE VALUE OF REGIONAL TOWNS AS THE PLACES TO GROW? LET'S NOT FORGET THAT YALE AND OXFORD UNIVERSITIES EXIST IN QUITE SMALL REGIONAL TOWNS!

BUT BACK TO THE TOPIC – WHAT BENEFITS DOES A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY BRING? CLEARLY THERE IS AN ECONOMIC BENEFIT, WHICH WE CAN ESTIMATE. FOR THE LISMORE CAMPUS, WE CALCULATE THAT ITS TOTAL ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION, ALLOWING FOR THE EXPENDITURE OF THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS STAFF, STUDENTS AND SUPPLIERS, IS WELL OVER $0.25 BILLION AND IN EXCESS OF 2,000 JOBS – EACH FIGURE ABOUT 10% OF THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND THE JOBS IN THE LISMORE REGION.

BUT THERE IS MORE: ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS. A RECENTLY (2007) PUBLISHED ANALYSIS BY THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT, THE OECD, ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND REGIONS SAID THAT UNIVERSITIES HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

> "SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENTS HAVE DEMONSTRABLE IF INDIRECT ECONOMIC AS WELL AS INTRINSIC BENEFITS. THEY OFFER BENEFITS UNDERPINNING AND STABILISING ECONOMIC GROWTH, AS WELL AS DIRECT BENEFITS IN TERMS OF COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELFARE, SOCIAL COHESION, A DIVERSE CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LIFE, AND A CLEAN, HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE AND SELF RENEWING NATURAL AND MAN-

MADE ENVIRONMENT WITH ROBUST AND SERVICEABLE INSTITUTIONS INCLUDING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS THEMSELVES"

THAT MIGHT SOUND LIKE A LOFTY LIST OF IDEALS, BUT MUCH OF IT DERIVES FROM THE BENEFITS THAT GRADUATES ACCRUE FROM THEIR DEGREE BEYOND THE FINANCIAL GAINS, AND WHICH THEY BRING TO THEIR COMMUNITIES. A UK STUDY IN 2005 OF THESE WIDER BENEFITS SHOWED THAT GRADUATES:

- ENJOY HIGHER QUALITY JOBS WITH GREATER FLEXIBILITY AND AUTONOMY IN THEIR WORK, AND ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE UNEMPLOYED
- ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE IN HIGH-LEVEL POSITIONS
- ENJOY BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES (SMOKE LESS, EXERCISE MORE, LESS PRONE TO DEPRESSION)
- TEND TO HAVE A GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION
- ARE MORE INFLUENTIAL IN THE COMMUNITY, BY BEING ACTIVE CITIZENS WHO ARE MORE LIKELY TO PARTICIPATE IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES AND TO VOTE (AND OF COURSE IN THE UK, VOTING IS A VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY!)
- ARE MORE POSITIVE IN THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
- ARE A SOURCE OF WIDER INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

THESE BENEFITS FLOW TO GRADUATES OF REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES SPECIFICALLY BECAUSE THE UNIVERSITY IS THERE. PARTICIPATION RATES IN HIGHER EDUCATION ARE SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER WHEN THERE'S A UNIVERSITY IN TOWN THAN WHEN THERE'S NOT. WHICH IS WHY WE HAVE TO LOOK SERIOUSLY AT HOW BEST TO MAKE THIS ACCESS AVAILABLE MORE WIDELY – TECHNOLOGY MUST SURELY BE A VEHICLE FOR THIS. AND THE

NEW AUSTRALIAN BROADBAND NETWORK IS A CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE NEED.

I COULD GO ON AND IDENTIFY THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF RESEARCH IN SOLVING REGIONAL PROBLEMS AND BRINGING IN IDEAS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE – THE UNIVERSITY AS A CONDUIT FROM THE REGION TO THE WORLD. AND I COULD POINT TO THE WAY CLINICAL DISCIPLINES PROVIDE AFFORDABLE ACCESS TO A WIDE RANGE OF HEALTH SERVICES IN REGIONAL AREAS.

BUT A CRITICAL AREA OF INTEREST FOR ME OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS HAS BEEN THE EXTENT TO WHICH A UNIVERSITY CAN BE ASSIGNED AND EXERCISE LEADERSHIP IN ITS REGION IN A WAY THAT I DON'T THINK METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITIES CAN.

WHEN I CAME TO SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY FIVE YEARS AGO I KNEW LITTLE ABOUT THE SPECIFICS OF ITS REGION. I HAD NOT WORKED IN NSW BEFORE, AND WHILE I RECOGNISED SOME SIMILARITIES WITH THE OTHER REGIONS I'D BEEN IN – BYRON BAY HAS SOME SIMILARITIES WITH NOOSA, FOR EXAMPLE – THERE CLEARLY WAS A LOT FOR ME TO LEARN.

I SET ABOUT SOME TASKS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE I'D BROUGHT WITH ME.

WE PREPARED A STRATEGIC PLAN WITH INPUT FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY, AND IT SEEMS TO HAVE STOOD THE TEST OF TIME. I ASKED OUR ACADEMIC SCHOOLS TO LOOK CLOSELY AT THE DEGREES THEY WERE OFFERING, TO REFRESH THEM, SIMPLIFY THEIR STRUCTURES AND MAKE THEIR IMPORTANT ELEMENTS AVAILABLE MORE WIDELY ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY – A PROCESS WE CALLED 'NEW DIRECTIONS'. WE ESTABLISHED AN OFFICE OF REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT, TO PROVIDE A 'DOOR' TO THE UNIVERSITY AND A FOCUS FOR OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH REGIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES.

WE GREW THE ENROLMENTS AT OUR SMALLER CAMPUSES AND STRENGTHENED OUR INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT PROGRAMS. WE INCREASED THE SUPPORT FOR OUR STRONGER RESEARCH PROGRAMS TO INCREASE THEIR PERFORMANCE AND HENCE THEIR COMPETITIVENESS. WE ESTABLISHED A UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION, TO HELP US IDENTIFY IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES WHICH THEY COULD WORK WITH US TO SUPPORT – SUCH AS THE HEALING CIRCLE IN GNIBI.

WE TOOK SOME BIG STEPS. STARTING A COMPLETELY NEW CAMPUS AT THE GOLD COAST, BRAVELY A FEW METRES NORTH OF COOLANGATTA CREEK AND THEREFORE IN QUEENSLAND, WAS ONE SUCH STEP. AND I HOPE THAT THIS WILL INCREASE STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE SOUTHERN END OF THE GOLD COAST, CURRENTLY ONE OF THE LOWEST PARTICIPATION RATES IN AUSTRALIA.

BEGINNING DISCUSSIONS WITH CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY, AT LEAST IN PART, WAS ANOTHER STEP WHICH MIGHT ENABLE US TO OFFER DEGREES IN DISCIPLINES, SUCH AS PHARMACY OR VETERINARY SCIENCE, WHICH WE CURRENTLY ARE NOT SET UP TO DO.

AND WE ARE VERY SUCCESSFUL IN OUR OWN RIGHT. WE HAVE CONTINUED TO GROW OUR STUDENT NUMBERS, AND IN 2007 BECAME LARGER THAN UNE IN TERMS OF STUDENT LOAD. WHEN THE LID COMES OFF IN 2012, SO THAT UNIVERSITIES CAN ENROL AS MANY STUENTS AS THEY WISH, I'M CONFIDENT SCU WILL BE WELL POSITIONED TO RESPOND. OUR RESEARCH, ESPECIALLY IN THE NATIONAL COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRES PROGRAM IS STRONG. AND WE HAVE RECENTLY APPOINTED AN ADDITIONAL GROUP OF TOP RATE PEOPLE TO OUR PROFESSORIATE.

BUT MY HOLY GRAIL IS STILL QUITE SOME WAY AWAY. THAT PRIZE WILL BE REACHED, IN MY VIEW, WHEN THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS REGION – OR REGIONS – ARE WORKING HAND IN GLOVE TO ACHIEVE THE THINGS THAT

THE PEOPLE OF THE REGION WANT. THE PROBLEM IS – AND IT TOOK ME A WHILE TO COME TO THIS UNDERSTANDING – THAT THERE IS NO REAL VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH TO DISCOVER WHAT ACTUALLY IS WANTED.

OUR REGION IS SPECIAL IN ITS OWN WAYS. ITS VILLAGE CHARACTER IN AND AROUND LISMORE IS DIFFERENT TO THE COFFS HARBOUR COASTAL STRIP, DIFFERENT AGAIN TO THE UNEASY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWEED AND THE SOUTHERN GOLD COAST.

BUT I DON'T SEE THESE DIFFERENCES AS INSURMOUNTABLE HURDLES. WE ALL WANT TO RETAIN THE CHARACTER AND BEAUTY OF OUR REGION WHILE RECOGNISING THAT ITS POPULATION MUST INEVITABLY INCREASE. I'VE NOT MET ANYONE WHO DOESN'T WANT TO PROVIDE REAL, MEANINGFUL JOBS FOR PEOPLE IN THE REGION. RESPECT FOR THE QUALITY OF OUR ENVIRONMENT AND A DESIRE TO ACT MORE SUSTAINABLY IS WIDESPREAD. OUR INDIGENOUS HERITAGE CAN OFFER NEW WAYS OF LEARNING, AS CAN THE EXPERIENCE OF NEW ARRIVALS TO OUR REGION, FROM THE RETIREES OF SYDNEY TO THE MIGRANTS FROM THE HORN OF AFRICA.

BUT WE DO NEED WAYS TO TALK TO EACH OTHER, AND TO HAVE A SOUND EVIDENCE BASE FOR THESE CONVERSATIONS. I THINK HAVING A PROPER COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND BROADBAND NETWORK IN OUR REGION IS AS IMPORTANT AS OUR ROAD SYSTEM. AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST NON-METROPOLITAN ARTS COMMUNITY NEEDS IT TO CONNECT TO THE WORLD, AND PERHAPS GROW A NEW, CLEAN, GREEN INDUSTRY FOR OUR REGION. AND THE UNIVERSITY CAN HELP IN PROVIDING THE EVIDENCE NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THIS.

AS A FIRST STEP, THROUGH OUR UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION, THE BUSINESS LEADERS FORUM WE ESTABLISHED THIS YEAR AND OTHERS GROUPS, WE HAVE BEEN GUIDED TOWARDS THE IDEA OF A 'REGIONAL FUTURES INSTITUTE'. SOMETHING WIDE ENOUGH TO SPAN THE CULTURAL, ECONOMIC

AND SOCIAL ELEMENTS OF OUR REGION BUT WITH THE CAPACITY TO DO THE ANALYSIS AND PROJECTIONS THAT MAKES GOOD ARGUMENTS INTO IRREFUTABLE ONES. I HOPE TO SEE THAT INSTITUTE BLOSSOM AND FLOURISH, AND BE THE VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH WE CAN TEST OUR PEOPLE'S IDEAS, CHALLENGE OUR PREJUDICES AND FIND COMMON GROUND. AND IT SHOULD WORK CLOSELY WITH THE NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA ORGANISATIONS ANNOUNCED RECENTLY.

LIKE I SAID, BEING A VICE-CHANCELLOR IS A GREAT JOB. YOU'LL HAVE SEEN THAT BEING A VC OF A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY SUCH AS SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY IS BETTER YET. THERE IS SOON TO BE A NEW PERSON IN THE CHAIR, AND I'M SURE PETER LEE'S IDEAS AND PRIORITIES WILL NOT EXACTLY MATCH MINE – INDEED, BRINGING NEW LEADERSHIP IS ANOTHER WAY IN WHICH UNIVERSITIES HAVE RE-INVENTED THEMSELVES OVER THE CENTURIES.

BUT I HOPE I'VE MANAGED TO MOVE THE UNIVERSITY ALONG, AS PETER WILL, IN ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE REGION – SURELY THE BEST PLACE IN THE WORLD.

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14/7/09