



Speech

For Immediate Release

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Speaker Jennifer Westacott, CEO, Business Council of Australia

Venue Business Council of Australia 2012 Annual Dinner

Delivery 7.40pm, Thursday 15 November 2012

Chief Executive's remarks

[After choir]

That was the Gondwana National Indigenous Children's Choir. And what a what wonderful way to start the evening.

I do want to tell you a bit about the choir in a few minutes' time. But first, let me welcome you all here to our annual dinner for 2012.

A special welcome to the Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, Premier Barry O'Farrell, ministers and shadow ministers, other distinguished guests, friends one and all.

Members and staff of the Business Council of Australia are delighted to have you all here with us this evening.

We very much look forward to spending this time with you.

Let me begin by introducing Michael West from the Metro Local Aboriginal Land Council to offer us a 'Welcome to Country'.

[Michael West gives 'Welcome to Country']

Thank you Michael for your "Welcome to Country". This gathering takes place on the land of your ancestors. We respect that special and enduring relationship you have with your land.

Format of the evening

One of the functions of the Gondwana National Indigenous Children's Choir is to give talented young Indigenous people a vehicle to preserve and share their culture.

With support from one of our member companies, Rio Tinto, it's a real pleasure to have choir members from Darwin, Jabiru, Cairns, the Torres Strait Islands, from country New South Wales and from Sydney.

The children are ranged in age between 10 and 16. Some are very new members of the choir. Others have been with Gondwana since its inception back in 2008.

We are thrilled to have you and artistic director, Lyn Williams, with us here for this special evening in the annual calendar of the Business Council of Australia.

So to give you all a sense now of how the evening will run.

As part of their individual development, members of the choir are going to be introducing themselves around the room after giving us one more song in a few minutes time.

After entrée, Business Council of Australia President Tony Shepherd will make some remarks before introducing our guest speaker tonight, the Prime Minister, the Honourable Julia Gillard.

The last formal part of the evening will be the vote of thanks to the Prime Minister straight after main course at around 9.30.

After that, we hope you will stay to talk and mingle over dessert and coffee.

One country, many voices

When you took your seats this evening, you would have found a copy of our annual review for 2012.

Each year, as we develop this publication, we look for a theme that best describes our activities and our approach during the year.

And the one for this year works on a number of different levels.

I know when we told Lyn Williams from the choir that this year's theme was 'One Country, Many Voices', she understood straight away.

The Business Council of Australia is a voice that represents the contribution of the many voices who are our members. The chief executives of large companies across different sectors of the Australian economy.

Tonight, I really want to acknowledge our members. I want to thank them for:

- the jobs they create
- the prosperity they build
- the contributions they make to the community.

And, of course, I want to thank them for the contribution they make to the Business Council of Australia.

I want to thank the CEOs who give so much time

- to take part in our policy committees
- to come to meetings where we wrestle with big policy challenges in Australia
- to attend events and forums, and hear from different speakers – politicians, senior bureaucrats, international experts.

I thank the committee and task force chairs who spend hours on the phone with me going through papers and submissions.

These are some of the busiest people in Australia – John Denton, Richard Goyder, Grant King,, Rohan Mead, David Peever, Michael Rose and Kim Williams.

I am overwhelmed by their generosity of time and energy and interest.

I want people in this room to know that when our CEOs sit down together to talk policy, what they wrestle with is always, always about:

- what's best for our nation
- what's going to deliver the enduring prosperity for future generations
- what's going to keep giving us the intergenerational mobility and opportunity
- what's going to break down the opportunity barriers for Indigenous Australians and other groups our nation can't continue to leave behind.

For economic reasons and for moral reasons.

Our members talk about these things passionately, and I feel honoured to be at every one of those meetings and to listen to those conversations.

It's my job to share some sense of that with you tonight. A sense that sitting in this room are CEOs of Australia who care about this country.

And I really thank them for that.

Because they have a vision for Australia, just like everyone in this room has a vision.

The 'One Country, Many Voices' theme is also an acknowledgement of you, and others who are not in this room.

We know at the Business Council that we are one of many voices speaking up on behalf of national prosperity and well being.

And a very important part of what we do is to consult and to listen to others.

- the people we test our ideas with and who give us honest, stimulating, challenging feedback
- the people we sit on panels with at forums and seminars and events across the country.
- the ministers and shadow ministers and their staff who give us so much access and so much time
- the public servants who always meet with us in a spirit of collaboration and co-operation
- our colleagues in the non-government sector and the labour movement.

As George Megalogenis often reminds us, no substantive reform can be achieved in this country without an alliance and cooperation between every organisation represented in this room.

You are all here. And it's a sign that, notwithstanding the odd prickly conversation, we know that what we share in terms of a commitment and a vision for the country is worth so much more.

Let me finish by thanking our president, and my friend, Tony Shepherd.

All the things I said earlier about the membership – Tony demonstrates those qualities in spades.

He is a great leader, and having reached the halfway mark of his term as president, I have to say that the passion and energy he puts into the role is quite extraordinary.

So now, please enjoy the evening. Starting off with another song from the Gondwana National Indigenous Children's Choir.

For further information contact:

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The Business Council of Australia (BCA) brings together the chief executives of 100 of Australia's leading companies. For almost 30 years, the BCA has provided a unique forum for some of Australia's most experienced corporate leaders to contribute to public policy reform that affects business and the community as a whole.

Our vision is for Australia to be the best place in the world in which to live, learn, work and do business.