



GRAEME INNES FAREWELL SPEECH

AHRC, SYDNEY, 4 JULY 2014

JENNY MACKLIN MP

***** CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY *****

What a privilege it is to be speaking here to honour Graeme this evening.

Listening to Graeme's speech at the National Press Club this week, I thought – how lucky are we?

How lucky are we as a nation to have a voice as intelligent, brave and compassionate as Graeme's?

Graeme, that speech on Wednesday gave us so much. It gave us an appreciation of the man you are – how much you love your family, how much you have achieved in your professional and personal life.

But what I enjoyed most was that it left us with no doubt that your passion to continue the good fight burns brighter than ever.

To call out the disgraceful demonisation of people with disability that has been splashed across our newspapers on an almost weekly basis.

To call out the “lifters and leaners” language being peddled a concept you described as “facile.”

Graeme, tonight we thank you for your tireless and truly ground-breaking work as Australia's first full time Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

You have made us all richer people, and Australia a richer nation.

A great advocate.

I want to pay tribute to the huge role you played in ensuring the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) became a reality.

Your strong and passionate advocacy. The role you played in educating the community. And the significant contribution you made to the scheme's design.

Our country will be forever changed because of it.

On a personal level, I will never forget it. I will always cherish the experience of working with you to make it happen, against so many odds.

The sadness I feel at Australia now being without a full time Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

This is not to underestimate the dedication with which Susan Ryan will approach her role. I know Susan will do a fantastic job, and Susan, I wish you all the very best and look forward to working with you.

But this is a seriously backwards step for our country.

A seriously backwards step.

This decision has tried to silence a very important voice for people with disability. But that voice will not be silenced.

Graeme, I cannot wait to see what you choose to do next. I cannot wait to continue to listen and watch as you take up the good fight.

Australians will continue to be educated and inspired by you.

There are exciting times ahead for you.

Graeme, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. And if I could take a leaf out of your book and finish with Dr Suess:

"You're off to Great Places!

Today is your day!

Your mountain is waiting,

So...get on your way!"

(Dr Suess, Oh, the Places You'll Go!)