

Speech: Opening the Keck Workshop

Vice Chancellor - Professor Linda Kristjanson

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Ladies and Gentlemen – distinguished guests all – it is an honour indeed to open the first Keck Workshop outside of the United States and to welcome you all to Swinburne.

First, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the people of the Kulin Nation, as the custodians of this land. We also pay respects to all Aboriginal Community Elders, past and present, who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the history of this region.

I'd also like to personally thank Professor Emeritus Frank Larkins – one of Victoria's Chief Scientists for being here today. His presence is symbolic of Victoria's commitment to advancing science and research and this is certainly a commitment that Swinburne University shares a passion for.

Thank you also, to all those who have travelled a great distance to be here. As a Canadian I know only too well how long that plane flight is. In fact I only just returned yesterday from attending a conference in Canada – so truly, thank you for being here.

Swinburne is a relatively young and flexible university, with astronomy one of the most important pillars that has ensured we are ranked among the top 100 universities in the world in physics and the top 500 universities in the world overall.

We have a clear vision to build a new benchmark for modern universities in our region, creating a critical mass of research strength around core areas where we have strength – such as astrophysics and supercomputing - and devoting resources and our own energy to make those areas stand out.

It is therefore significant for Swinburne to host such an eminent group of astronomers, not just because this is a very significant workshop, but also because we have made a clear and profound commitment to grow astronomy as a discipline, because of its value to science, knowledge and understanding.

The past and future of our world is contingent upon the universe it sits in and new frontiers of knowledge await us as we peer deeper into space.

Last year, for the first time, I had the opportunity to view the night sky from the Keck observatory without leaving the Hawthorn campus. It's wonderfully exciting to know that tucked away in a control room here on campus is a direct link to the world's largest optical telescope, more than 9000 kilometres away and beyond that the galaxies around us.

Swinburne's Centre for Astrophysics and Supercomputing is the largest astronomical research group in Victoria and we are privileged to have access to the telescopes for up to 20 nights a year.

This is the farthest distance a telescope of this class has been remotely controlled, routinely, in real time, and the technology that enables this system is in itself a marvel.

The beauty of this facility is that it not only saves our astronomers precious travel time; it also reduces greenhouse gas emissions and allows staff and students to work closely while on opposite

sides of the world. For a university that is deeply committed to both sustainability and development of deep, effective international links, these factors are critical.

Direct access to this facility has enabled Swinburne astronomers to make some amazing discoveries, including: the discovery of a diamond planet by an international research team led by Professor Matthew Bailes; the discovery by Dr George Hau and Professor Duncan Forbes of a 'galactic freak'; and Professor Duncan Forbes' discovery that giant galaxies that contain billions of stars are born in much the same way as delicate snowflakes.

This partnership, which allows Swinburne to collaborate with a wide range of Keck users, represents the best in academic leadership – with practical application, spirited collaboration and profound results. This is the type of academic community to which many aspire.

Swinburne's goal is to continue to build on our achievements and develop further international partnerships. We will continue to develop a platform for dialogue. We will continue to find ways to facilitate ideas exchange.

And breaking through the artifice of national boundaries we will continue to drive success and achieve excellence in the pursuit of new discoveries.

The excellence, practicality and impact of your collective collaborations on astronomy is a clear and quantifiable example of fine academic leadership. You have engaged the general public in complex knowledge boundaries, you have demonstrated the benefits of borderless collaboration and you have succeeded in attracting funding and interest in new projects over and over again.

It is a privilege to be able to support and sustain this important research linkage, and I have no doubt that it will generate many new discoveries in years to come.

Before I finish, I must encourage you to explore Melbourne during your visit here. Recently rated the fourth best student city in the world by QS, Melbourne is also the second most multicultural city in the world after Tel Aviv. For visitors, that means great restaurants and vibrant shopping areas. This campus is blessed with exceptional links to public transport, making it easy to get in and out of the city – but our immediate vicinity also offers great cafes and large parks for a morning walk or an evening stroll. The laneways of Melbourne's city centre have become famous for an amazing collection of restaurants, bars and shops and we have several excellent museums and galleries for those of you with a little more time.

A word of thanks also, to Professor Schmidt who will be MC at tomorrow's evening event. Brian Schmidt had the foresight to plant six clones of pinot noir vines on a steep block near Canberra in 1999, with the hope that wine production would be peaking as his astronomy career curtailed. However, success writes its own stories and the winning of a Nobel Prize for Physics in 2011 will most surely mean that there will be no quiet retirement for Brian. At the same time, the success of his winery has led him to develop a new label (star crossed of course) and no doubt you are all looking forward to sampling some of the fruits of his labours as you go on a vigneron's journey around Australia this evening.

Thank you again for being part of this workshop. I hope you find it valuable and I look forward to hearing of new discoveries and developments resulting from the wonderful work you all do.