

**Mr Tony Shepherd's speech at
The Foodbowl Modernisation project dinner for
The Hon. John Brumby, Premier of Victoria
Tuesday 26th August, 6.30 for 7pm**

The Hon. John Brumby, Premier, the Hon. Tim Holding, the Hon. Jacinta Allen, the Hon. Kaye Darveniza, the Hon. Ben Hardman, Mayor Eric Bott, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to start by thanking Ross McPherson and John Corboy for the invitation to join you at this celebratory dinner tonight. It's not often that I find myself in complete accord with a media person. The drive by Ross and John to get the Foodbowl Modernisation Project on the State and National Agenda is a big part of why we are here tonight. Ross and John, congratulations and on behalf of the wider community, thank you.

Of course, I also have to thank and congratulate The Global Foundation and Steve Howard, who have been enthusiastic promoters of the Project. This is a little self congratulatory given I am a director of the Foundation and Transfield Services is a member.

I seem to be giving frequent speeches congratulating the Premier of Victoria and his government on their vision and initiative. As Chairman of ConnectEast, I have commented often on the Premier's foresight and courage in developing the EastLink Project.

I thank Premier Brumby and his government for recognising the potential of the Foodbowl Project to invigorate the region and to conserve and maximise the value of one of our most valuable resources in water. In congratulating the government, I must make particular mention of Ministers Holding and Allen. Their drive and dedication have been a major factor in getting this project successfully launched.

I also wish to congratulate the Federal Government for its strong support of the Foodbowl Project. We are entering a new era of co-operative federalism and this project is a fine example.

If we may pause for a brief commercial, Transfield Services is a key member of the Future Flow Alliance led by Goulburn Murray Water and including our good friends SKM and local company Comdain Civil Construction. With us tonight are the Chairman of GMW, Mr. Stephen Mills and the CEO, Mr. David Stewart, Mr. David Mathlin from SKM, Mr. Tom Coen from Comdain and Mr Jim Gaha from Transfield Services.

As you have seen, the Future Flow Alliance has completed these Foodbowl works on behalf of the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project (or “NVIRP”) and Goulburn Murray Water. This work has a combined value of \$120m and was completed on time to a very tight programme. It was also on budget, of good quality and importantly very safe. Funding for this first project came from Goulburn Murray Water, Federal Agencies, and NVIRP.

The Chairman of NVIRP, Mr. Richard Guy and CEO, Mr. Murray Smith are with us tonight. Richard and Murray, we wish you well on the journey ahead. You have a massive but exciting task and you will create a lasting legacy for the people of Northern Victoria.

This first work included automating over 1500 gates, lining 29km of high loss channels, rationalising unneeded infrastructure, constructing a major new off take structure, installing 5 new radio communication towers and remediating 6 others and surveying 100’s of sites for meter installation. All in only 12 weeks.

It has taken many years but infrastructure is now back on the national agenda and is recognised as a vital contributor to our growth and more importantly to our prosperity.

On the 50th Anniversary of the Snowy in 1999 I spoke at a forum in Cooma on whether we had lost the nation building spirit, which had characterised Australia’s huge growth spurt in the 1950’s and 1960’s. I did a reprise on this issue at a conference at the ANU in December last year.

My conclusion last year, was that although there has been some improvement there are still significant gaps in our national infrastructure. I gave water supply and regional development as prime examples.

We rank 20 out of 25 OECD countries for investment in infrastructure as a proportion of GDP. My view is that we have not taken full advantage of our great prosperity over the past 10 to 15 years. I welcome the Federal Government's initiative to set up Infrastructure Australia and to invest some of this prosperity in major infrastructure projects.

The Foodbowl project is a classic example of what is required. It combines regional development with a significant investment in value adding infrastructure. The current shortage of water in the valley highlights the need for investment in improving water efficiency. It demonstrates our capacity to produce more food with less water in a sustainable way. It's important to our national exporting capacity and to our prosperity. Food is the world's most valuable and essential commodity.

Ross and John are not resting on their laurels and are developing ways to leverage the new infrastructure to attract new industries to the Goulburn Valley.

In recognition of this, may I say, on behalf of The Global Foundation and the wider Australian business community, that we are willing to continue to lend our support, where we can, to the next phase of your Foodbowl vision, as you recruit investment and expand your global markets.

I wish the Project well as it moves on to the next exciting phase, and of course the Future Flow Alliance partners stand ready to assist. This project has and will transform the Goulburn Valley.

Thank you for your kind invitation and the opportunity to talk to you this evening.