



May 8 2008

**OFFICIAL OPENING
FAIRFAX MEDIA HEADQUARTERS AT ONE DARLING ISLAND, PYRMONT**

**REMARKS OF DAVID KIRK, CEO, RONALD WALKER, CHAIRMAN, AND
CYNTHIA BANHAM, DIPLOMATIC EDITOR, *THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD***

Remarks Of David Kirk, CEO

Prime Minister Rudd
Minister Stephen Conroy
Leader of the Opposition Brendan Nelson
The Member for Wentworth, Malcolm Turnbull
Our Chairman Ronald Walker and members of the Board
Cynthia Banham
Distinguished guests
Our staff and colleagues:

Thank you and welcome to the official opening of Fairfax Media's headquarters here at One Darling Island.

We are honoured that you are here to mark this occasion.

Another chapter in the great history of our company has begun.

One Darling Island was carefully chosen, and carefully engineered.

What has been made more possible from this building is our evolution as a digital multimedia company in the 21st century.

The physical attributes of One Darling Island will help optimise key values we want to drive throughout the company:

A less hierarchical and more expansive working environment.

And physical space that brings us more together, across mastheads and across media and across business units, permitting greater collaboration among colleagues.

One Darling Island provides us with a superb technological infrastructure that puts us on the leading edge of the planning, gathering, editing, and distribution of news and the wealth of other information and content that define Fairfax Media publications – in print, online and on air.

One Darling Island is also a significantly greener building, from its energy consumption to water conservation and reuse.

At the same time, we wanted a building where we could highlight what we achieve as a publisher and properly honour our rich heritage – a history that is inextricably intertwined with the history of this State, Victoria and the Nation.

As a media company, we bear a very important responsibility to help make our democracy work.

Free speech and a free press are indivisible with democracy.

Last week was a bad week for the freedom of the press in Australia.

Police raided a newspaper office in Perth to try to find the source of a story on what the State Government might spend on advertising in an election year.

Some crime.

It's the kind of story, Prime Minister, that you highlighted – to good political effect, I might add – in last year's Federal election campaign.

And in Canberra, the Treasury denied a Freedom of Information request because they feared that it might spur too much debate on an important issue of the day.

Since when, in a democracy, do we fear too much debate?

These are retrograde – indeed, they are dangerous – steps, and are unworthy of our democracy.

Prime Minister, last year you outlined a courageous strengthening of our Freedom of Information laws.

Let's work together to make those changes happen this year.

And let's enact legislation that will shield journalist's sources so that they can do their jobs and serve the public and its right to know.

A free media is indispensable to the operation of a democracy, and the democracy that is Australia is and will be forever stronger by virtue of what Fairfax Media is: a vigorous, free, fearless, independent and enduring press.

And it does not matter anymore whether that press is metal or cyber.

The mission is the same and the public trust has never changed.

Those of us associated with publishing companies such as Fairfax Media – if we are to do our jobs properly – have to be more than the owners and operators of our newspapers, magazines, websites and other electronic media.

We are not so much owners but custodians of that public trust, and the people we serve –

Especially our readers, wherever we reach them, along with the public at large.

This is what we do every day, every year, every decade, every century.

And from this place, we will do it better than ever.

I am pleased to introduce the Chairman of the Board, and a great champion for our company, Ron Walker.

Remarks of Ronald Walker, Chairman

Thank you David

Prime Minister Rudd
Minister for Communications - Senator Conroy
Leader of the Opposition - Brendan Nelson
Member for Wentworth - Malcolm Turnbull
My Directors: Roger Corbett, Bob Savage, Nick Fairfax
My fellow Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen

Firstly may I welcome all our guests today on behalf of our board and staff to the opening of our new head office, especially our Prime Minister who by any measure, has had a very successful start to his Prime Ministership.

Prime Minister, if I knew how to say, “Good afternoon” in Mandarin – I would.

It is true to say great enterprises are born, and then they are made and remade.

The Sydney Herald – the predecessor of Fairfax Media- was born right here in Sydney on April 18th 1831 by three immigrants: Alfred Stevens, Frederick Stokes and William McGarvie.

The Sydney Morning Herald started life as the Sydney Herald a seven penny weekly printed by hand on a Columbian press with a grand circulation of 750 copies.

The same paper as on your seat today.

Ten years later in 1841, the sole remaining owner, Frederick Stokes – no relation to Kerry - sold the paper to two more recent arrivals; Charles Kemp, who was by then the Herald’s first parliamentary reporter and John Fairfax, formerly a printer and publisher at Leamington Press in Warwickshire, UK.

I’m proud to say Prime Minister, we’ve come a long way since such humble beginnings.

Since 1856, Fairfax has moved only three times.

In 1831 we printed in Redman’s Court in George Street.

In 1856 we moved to the corner of Pitt and O'Connell Streets and the company occupied that site for 99 years.

In 1955 Fairfax moved to Broadway and in 1995 to Darling Park.

Today we can proudly boast that we are the largest media company in Australasia, publishing 360 newspapers and magazines. This includes 18 radio stations in Australia and 23 newspapers in the USA.

With 177 years of continuous publishing, this makes us one of the oldest publishers in the world – older even than The New York Times – and clearly, from our research, perhaps the oldest registered company in Australia.

We indeed are proud of our heritage, proud of the independence of our journalists and proud of our achievements in recent years under David Kirk's leadership.

To introduce our Prime Minister this afternoon, we have given this honour to Cynthia Banham and I must say we are blessed with her presence here today, for many reasons:

Cynthia is one of the most gifted journalists of her generation.

Whilst covering the Indonesian visit of the former Foreign Minister, regrettably, tragedy struck our company in 2007.

Sadly on Wednesday 7th March 2007 on board a Garuda airlines flight GA200 in clear skies this aircraft, carrying 140 passengers including Cynthia and Morgan Mellish from the Financial Review, overshot the runway at high speed and crashed at Yogyakarta airport.

Tragically Morgan died, but a determined Cynthia managed to crawl from the wreckage, now an inferno, and live.

After an urgent transfer by the RAAF to a Perth hospital for countless skin grafts and rehabilitation greatly assisted by her partner Michael Harvey and her parents John and Lori Banham, who are with us today, I was given permission to visit Cynthia by her surgeon Dr Fiona Wood, our celebrated burns specialist and 2005 Australian of the Year.

Our first meeting will always be in my memory. Cynthia is one of the most courageous people I have ever met.

With her will to live, she is a testament to courage and the will to survive at all costs. And may I say, Michael, your love for Cynthia has played a big part in her rehabilitation and I thank you on behalf of us all.

In order to prevent a reoccurrence of this tragedy I have written to the Federal Government together with David Kirk and John Hartigan; Chairman of News Ltd, requesting the Government to lease a larger VIP aircraft to enable our journalist to travel in a safe aircraft and I know Prime Minister you are considering this at the moment. Later when Cynthia

returned to Canberra I joined with our Sydney Morning Herald Editor, Alan Oakley in hosting a welcome back party. On that morning there was an unexpected visitor:

Kevin Rudd, then Opposition Leader, called in to welcome Cynthia back and made a very emotional speech of welcome which I have never forgotten.

It now gives me enormous pleasure in welcoming Cynthia Banham to introduce our Prime Minister.

Thank you.

Remarks of Cynthia Banham, Diplomatic Editor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

Thank you very much.

It is great to be here today, and to be back among my Fairfax colleagues, for the first time in more than a year.

I was very happy to be given the opportunity to speak before you here today, mostly because I have wanted for some time to acknowledge the many people who have supported me since the crash.

I hope you don't mind if I say a few of those thank yous now.

First, to my family --- my parents and brothers Anthony, Sebastian and my sister Juliette. They have been there for me throughout this very traumatic period, and I am very happy that they are here today to share this moment with me.

To the medical professionals who saved my life and who have worked to rehabilitate me over the last 14 months --- especially my surgeons Dr Fiona Wood and Dr Suzanne Rae in Perth, but also to the numerous other doctors, nurses and therapists both in Western Australia and Canberra who have helped me in my recovery. This includes my prosthetist Kevin Harrison who is here with me today, assisting me in what is my first public appearance with my new limbs.

And to my colleagues at Fairfax.

In particular I would like to give a special acknowledgement to our Chairman Ron Walker. Ron has paid a very close personal interest in my recovery, regularly calling me to see how I was going and offering me assistance. Knowing how concerned our Chairman was for my welfare has meant an awful lot to me at a very difficult time.

I would also like to thank the CEO David Kirk and my editor Alan Oakley for their support. Alan in particular has provided constant moral support and has helped me refashion a new role at the paper, of diplomatic editor, and has guided my return to writing. And to the rest of the Herald staff.

I was reminded recently of the impact that my injuries had on the Herald staff when I watched a DVD which was put together for me by my friend Diane Nazaroff, during the early days of my hospitalization. It had me in tears. The DVD contained messages of support from members of staff, and their obvious concern and anguish at what had happened to me was very moving. The cards and gifts from colleagues, the photo which was organised of staff and sent to me in hospital --- it has all meant a great deal to me. Just knowing how much you wanted me to live really lifted my spirits when they needed lifting the most.

It has been a very difficult year. What happened to me and to Morgan Mellish was a reminder of the dangers journalists face in simply doing their job. Morgan Mellish was a very special person, a good friend of mine and a great journalist, and his loss will remain with me for the rest of my life.

Journalists take risks because we believe in the absolutely critical role good journalism can play in a democracy. That is why I love working at the Herald, and why I couldn't wait to get back to writing after my release from hospital, despite everything that happened. Journalism means everything to me, and I am grateful that despite losing so much, I have not lost the ability to write, and to do my job.

I would also like to acknowledge the role the Herald and Age's Jakarta correspondent Mark Forbes played in my evacuation from Indonesia. Mark, who was also a good friend of Morgan's, was the person who found me in a hospital in Jogjakarta.

Finally I should mention the many cards, gifts and messages which flooded in from readers of the Herald and other strangers. It was overwhelming.

I guess above all the person I would like to single out for the amazing personal sacrifices he has made for me is Michael. Assisted by the generosity and support of his own employer, our competitor News Limited, Michael has been there for me every single day for the last 14 months, enduring my tedious rehabilitation with me, developing new medical skills which match any specialist burns nurse, and enabling me to return to writing. Without him, the truth is I don't know how I would have gotten through the last year.

And now, I would like to welcome our Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to --- as it was put to me --- the lion's den of some 700 journalists. Prime Minister, I know you will have no problems handling such large numbers of us, and you can be assured nothing you say here today will go any further.

It was in fact the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd who gave me my first scoop after returning to Canberra from Perth where I was hospitalised. It was his first print interview after taking office. Thank you Prime Minister for the role you played in my return to political journalism.

A change of government is a very exciting time for a journalist covering politics. Prime Minister Rudd has certainly altered the political landscape in Australia and made political journalism very interesting for the past six months or more.

Welcome Prime Minister Rudd.