

**Speech by Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, AC
Governor of Queensland**

Launch Address

Foodbank Christmas Appeal

Foodbank Warehouse, 179 Beverley Street, Colmslie

9 December 2007

Our Minister for Transport, Trade, Employment and Industrial Relations *the Hon John Mickel*

Chairman, Foodbank Queensland *Mr Ian Brusasco*

and Directors of the Foodbank Queensland Board *Mr John Blake, Ms Betty Read & Mrs Molly Robson*

Members of the community sector represented here today *Rev Tim Hodgson, Maj Graham Tamsett, Sgt Peter Farley & Mr Matthew Swift*

President Queensland Law Society *Ms Megan McMahon*

Ladies and gentlemen

I acknowledge the traditional keepers of the land on which we gather; and its present custodians, the keepers of this generous space and golden source of humanity and nourishment.

My friends, I feel privileged to join you this morning:

- in openly acknowledging and responding to the intolerable prevalence of hunger in our society;
- and observing Foodbank's fundraising and collection efforts planned for the coming fortnight:
 - as solid guideposts of your vision and year-round work to sustainably feed Australians in need,
 - and flaming arrows of your movement to spur our advantaged ranks.

As if from a distant country they speak our language with a strange dialect...

The word diet occurs more often than hunger.

Own, have, got, are dominant verbs, and their want is different to ours.

*Most difficult to comprehend even with constant repetition,
is the transposing of intention:*

Sympathy, with the addition of several buts, is changed to condemnation;

Victim becomes fault.

*I believe these peculiarities of speech are influenced
as much by the fullness of the stomach as the emptiness of the heart.**

*Maurice Strandgard, "Dialect of the Middle Class", *The Nailing of the Right Hand*, Penguin, 1994, p 61

Melbourne poet and playwright, Maurice Standgard, called it the *Dialect of the Middle Class*. Now in his late 70s, he's known as an earnest humanitarian, whose poetry reveals a deep sympathy for the marginalised and dispossessed.*

The: strange dialect" that Strandgard exposes is well known to us all – to some of us, it is our own, spoken with or without intent; others simply hear it, but must, quite unsimply endure it.

Hugh Mackay, one of Australia's most highly respected and published social researchers, heads his latest work with the question: *Advance Australia... Where?*

Poverty is an unwelcome word in contemporary Australia (Mackay says).

We're having an economic boom, after all, and we cling to the idea that ours is a land of equal opportunity; a middle-class society; a place where anyone can succeed with a decent education, hard work, and a bit of luck.

Ladies and gentlemen, affluence and good fortune raise uncomfortable contradictions:

- while one billion people on the planet carry their own and society's excesses on their very bodies;
- Another 800 million endure a daily deficit of nutrition that steadily erodes their physical health and their most basic participation in life.

In this country, obesity and related illnesses have burgeoned in men, women and children across all social stratum.

Yet we are discovering that hunger lingers in almost one in four households; many more in our indigenous communities:

Indeed, "*One of Australia's best-kept secrets*" ^

And, this morning, while we hear Foodbank's plea for support from prosperous city workplaces to share the abundance of the supermarket shelf, we learn too that rice, our once constant staple, is in waning supply.

■ Oliver Dennis, "Condolences of the Heart", *Australian Book Review*, April 2004

+ Hugh Mackay, *Advance Australia... Where?*, Hachette Australia, 2007, p 328

^ Figures quoted in Raj Patel's piece in *ON LINE opinion*, "The ABC of fat and thin down under", 1.10.07, Raj Patel is a researcher with the Land Research Action Network, and formerly with the World Bank, WTO, and UN.

On the fall of Icarus, Poet Auden observed:

*...how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster;
The ploughman may have heard the splash, the forsaken cry...*

*The sun shone
As it had on the white legs disappearing into the green water,
and the expensive, delicate ship...
Had somewhere to get to, and sailed calmly on.**

My friends, in this age of seemingly unprecedented prosperity we must:

- look towards the raw and untidy corners;
- face the ethical and humanitarian crises at society's margins;
- counter our apathy and fear of the big issues; and
- Traverse the chasm between rich and poor, between the fullness of the stomach and the emptiness of the heart.

Leaders, members, staff and volunteers of Foodbank Queensland, I sincerely praise your remarkable work in traversing the chasm; and your community and business partners, in scaffolding the pass.

And now, at a time of year when the gap between having and going without glares in sharp and painful relief, I am profoundly grateful that today we flag the start of the Foodbank Queensland Christmas Appeal.

? W H Auden, *Musee de Beaux Arts*; inspired by Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, 1558