**In 2023, we can hear Australia**

**Australia Day address, 26 January 2023**

**Esperance, Western Australia**

When we think of Australia we don’t normally think of poetry. But one of the greatest pieces of poetry comes from Australia.

It starts with compelling clapping before instruments join and then we hear the start of the most powerful rallying cry Australia has: “we have a chance to turn the pages over”.

John Farnham’s *The Voice* is one of those songs that sends shivers up my spine. It strikes at the very heart of what it means to be Australian.

Farnham sings “you’re the voice, try and understand it”. Reminding us that we shouldn’t just say something but know why we are saying it.

Like many, after a couple of years off, I went overseas last year. When I told people I was Australian they would smile and remind me that we are far away, somehow we’d always find a common reference point and then they would tell me that they like Australians. One taxi driver in Europe said “something about your people, you’re good”.

My father’s family is from Greece, and I went there for the first time. As soon as I got off the plane it was enlightening. People who I had never met felt familiar. When I went to the UK, where my mother was born, I had a similar feeling: these people are part of me.

Seeing a Greek man and his son talking vigorously in the street, bountiful bougainvillea everywhere, where feta cheese is served as a stand-alone meal and people who see rules and schedules as optional, all of this left me knowing that I know them and they are part of me.

But it made me think deeper about being Australian. This hit me hardest on the flight home to Perth, flying over the red dirt and blue ocean across WA while Farnsy played through my headphones.

Cramped into a tiny seat at the back of the plane, I was a blubbering mess thinking “now these are my people, this is my home, and this is where I belong”.

What separates Australia out from every other country is that in our long and complex history with the highs and lows that longevity brings, is that we face up to these imperfections. As a country and people, we are not faultless. Nobody is, but we have the insight to acknowledge that.

In these flaws, we stick true to the fair go. We know that everyone deserves a chance to say what they want to say and to be who they want to be. While we don’t always agree, we largely find the middle ground and can move forward.

At the heart of the fair go, and being Australian, is the opportunity to use our voices to talk up and, where we need to, talk back. The fair go isn’t always a big act, often it is listening to each other, really listening.

At cafes, down the beach, over the kitchen table, with a drink, with the fold-out chairs on the front lawn, none of these we do alone, we do them together. We aren’t just talking, but we are hearing each other out. We tell the stories of our days and lives, invariably those with us say we deserve better, are doing a good job, that the kids should be better behaved.

We do that because we know each other, and we want to support our mates. You can see these conversations in action on the streets we have lived on for decades or the town we happen to be in for the weekend. No matter where you go, you will find an Australian up for a chat, giving you a voice and space of your own.

However, not all Australians have a voice. It is incumbent on all of us to live the values of the fair go and to really give a voice to all Australians. If we want to live the fair go then we need to listen and respond to what people say.

Part of this is understanding our history as Australians. The increased use of Indigenous words, languages and cultural practices in our daily lives is part of this, which was incomprehensible just a few years ago.

I’m proud to be Australian because I know we are all working to make this country better than it was yesterday, by righting the wrongs, learning the breadth of 65,000 years of history and reconciling to move forward.

We are not a people who sit in silence or fear. We stand together and turn the page for the better. We can reflect, respect and celebrate what it means to be Australian.