**Speech by HE Geoff Tooth**

**Australian High Commissioner to Kenya**

**to the Caledonian Society, St Andrew’s Ball**

**Loresho Eye Hospital**

**30 November 2013**

Chieftain Rob Porter, former Chieftains, His Excellency the British High Commissioner, members of the Caledonian Ball Committee and Society,

On behalf of all the guests, on behalf of all the bonnie lasses, the clansmen, the bairns, the jocks, the Bampots, the Blutered, the Gadgee, the Man-nee, the Radgees, the Weegies, the Minnys, and all the other ees that I cannot pronounce gathered here tonight, can I thank you for this wonderful evening.

Personally I am delighted and greatly honored to be standing before you tonight.

But let me begin by expressing my horror and my sympathies at what happened in Glasgow last night. Our thoughts are with all families, friends and clan. The only thing we should not be surprised to hear about this tragedy are the stories of courage and caring by those that rushed to help without a thought of their own safety.

Ladies and gentlemen

Many of you are probably a little mystified to have an Aussie in front of you on the feast of St Andrews.

There is of course no clan Tooth - it would be a most unusual tartan design.

So I presume this slot is offered alphabetically and the Argentine Ambassador was busy.

Or that you are seeking another official apology for Mel Gibson's acting and accent in Braveheart.

Maybe some of the attraction was that I am not English.

Or perhaps more likely that I come cheap. On that note a big thank you to the Chieftain and other organisers for the heavily discounted tickets - 8,000 schillings is indeed a bargain for such a great party.

But let me assure you that I am at heart a great admirer of all things Scottish.

Of all things Caledonian.

Some would indeed suggest that my history shows an almost unhealthy desire to become Caledonian by osmosis, by embracing all that makes your race such a wonder.

First and foremost, I embraced and then married a bonnie lass with impressive Caledonian heritage and the surname Stirling. For some extraordinary reason she chose not to either become a Tooth or even a Stirling-Tooth.

Secondly, I do love your food and drink. You may wonder at this. But just ask my doctor about my cholesterol levels and you will appreciate that I do indeed enjoy Haggis, quite possibly the single unhealthiest dish on the planet.

Unless of course you are tucking into Glasgow's culinary gifts to the world of chicken marsala followed by deep fried Mars Bars, all washed down by an iron bru. When taken together with a bit of haggis on the side quite possibly the most unhealthy dinner on the planet.

Then there is my obsession with single malt whisky, the only drink in the world where it is regarded as a good thing to have a peaty flavour. Peat - or to give it its other name … bog - is, according to the dictionary, a putrid soft black or brown substance formed from decaying plants. It shows rare genius to imagine it working so well in a drink.

On the arts front I am a great fan of your comedians, your music and your literature. There has been many a Burns supper in my history though I have only hazy recollections of some of them. There is not much that hasn’t been said about the immortal Robbie Burns, so disgracefully plagiarized by Shakespeare and Milton. Who can not wonder at such wonderful verse as his

. Ode to a louse,

. I reign in Jeanie’s Boosom,

. A Lass wi’ a tocher

. O Aye my wife she Dang me

and, my favourite,

. Johnie Lad, Cock up your Beaver.

And then of course there is my obsession with golf, that curse of a sport your kind has inflicted upon this world. A year or two back I even paid obscene amounts of money to tour your most famous courses. Not for the first time I wondered how the hell you could invent a game that involves 5 hours outside in the Scottish weather.

I really don’t think the official explanation that it was invented by shepherds to distract them from their sheep cuts the mustard.

On day two of my tour I stood pitifully on the first of Royal Aberdeen as a howling gale cut through the three woefully inadequate layers of clothing I had put on. Sleet slammed into my face, the wind made it difficult for me to stand. It was then a caddy approached and told us how lucky we were to be playing on the best day of the Scottish summer and how only just last week it had almost got so bad that some weak American tourists had nearly cancelled their round.

And the last and least of my Caledonian predilections has to do with that charming habit of you Scottish men to slip into a skirt at the slightest provocation. But with my wife here tonight I canne possibly talk more about that.

Lads and Lassies,

What I can say confidently though is that you Caledonians, as my daughter would say, rule. You have changed history, you have created wonders that will last the ages, written books and verse that inspire, been responsible for some of the great inventions and innovations.

Over the last year or so you have even produced a seriously good tennis player.

On the other hand it is a great shame about your rugby and soccer teams.

Now I’m going to be a little careful here. I am well aware of the Scottish saying that if you have 12 Caledonians and some bagpipes gathered together you have the making of a serious riot. But I am sure many of you will agree that you have a great history of disappointment on most football fields. In order to earn my discounted tickets for tonight I actually did some historical research and found a significant Kenyan connection on this front. The first soccer game newly independent Kenya played way back on 15 December 1963 was against Scotland. I’m sure even those who didn’t know this could confidently predict that Scotland lost and you most certainly did, 3-2. You might have done better if it wasn’t for the Kenyan goal keeper one Bob Erskine who saved a penalty in the 55th minute. He was of course a Scotsman, and a Scots Guardsman at that.

Now as an aside and as an Australian I couldn’t possibly not mention cricket tonight. I am sure that my dear friend the British High Commissioner will join me in warmly welcoming the extraordinary cricket result of this week – I am of course talking about Scotland’s splendid victory over the might of Papua New Guinea in Dubai on Thursday.

… there will be no sledging here tonight.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Aside from my own individual links, Australians and Caledonians have much in common.

There is of course the way we talk. The Scottish and Australian accents are very different but we are united by the fact that most of the rest of the world doesn’t have the foggiest idea what we are saying.

Then there is our joint attitude to authority, self-importance and pomposity. The Ethiopians have a wonderful saying along the lines of when meeting someone of supposed high status bow to the front, while breaking wind behind. Well Caledonians like Australians tend to do the opposite to that. And it has helped make us what we are and what we will always be …

Ladies and gentlemen,

The diplomatic guest at a dinner has been compared to being the body at a wake. They need you to have the party but lord they hope you don't say too much.

And tonight at this fine shindig I have said too much,

I’ve kept you far too long from your haggis and your peaty drinks, your masala and your Burns,

And of course from more dancing with the fine legged clansman or bonny lass that you hope will be warming your bed tonight.

Thank you for listening … or for pretending too anyway.

A blythe Yule and a good Hogmanay to you all.