

## **PROFESSOR LINDSAY MICHAEL BIRT**

### **Citation for the conferral of a Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*)**

Mr Chancellor, I present Professor Lindsay Michael Birt for admission to the degree of Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*).

Professor Birt is widely respected both nationally and internationally for his scholarship and leadership in the field of tertiary education. However, we at Charles Sturt University hold him in especially high regard since he was the Interim Vice-Chancellor of Charles Sturt University at its establishment in 1989.

Born in 1932, Michael Birt attended Melbourne Boys' High School and the University of Melbourne where he was awarded the degree, Bachelor of Agricultural Science, and later the first of his two Doctorates in Philosophy; the second being awarded by the University of Oxford. It was in Oxford that Michael Birt started his postgraduate career as a research worker in Biochemistry. His speciality was the biochemistry of the metamorphosis in insects; a speciality that demanded patience and close attention to detail.

Michael Birt returned to Australia in 1960 to take up the position of Lecturer in Biochemistry at the University of Melbourne. However, his passionate interest in the global perspective of education and research, led him back to the United Kingdom in 1964 as a Senior Lecturer in Biochemistry at the University of Sheffield. Subsequently, that University was to show its appreciation for his outstanding contributions by awarding him an honorary Doctorate of Laws.

Michael Birt returned to Australia where he became the Foundation Head of the Department of Biochemistry at the Australian National University. It is in Australia that Michael Birt was to make his great contributions to tertiary education. His dynamic leader and scientist's rational approach to problems and their solutions were to prove crucial to the founding of both the University of Wollongong and Charles Sturt University.

In 1973, Michael Birt was appointed Vice-Chancellor Designate to the University of Wollongong. At that time, Wollongong University College was an institution in transition facing all the insecurities and suspicions that come with change. The community and the faculty were uncertain about the change from college to university and anxious about its broader implications. They were unfamiliar with the new man at the helm and concerned about their own futures. Michael Birt appreciated these concerns and met the challenge head on as he has met other challenges during his distinguished career. His commitment to the cause of the new university was infectious. His new colleagues were quick to recognise his enthusiasm, his willingness to listen, his ability to grasp problems and propose solutions and his capacity to co-opt the assistance of friends and colleagues to achieve the goal of establishing a strong university. As a result of his guidance and unstinting efforts, first as Vice-Chancellor Designate and then as Vice-Chancellor from 1975 to 1981, the University of Wollongong was to develop a strong reputation both nationally and internationally. The University of Wollongong was to reward his outstanding contributions by awarding him an honorary Doctorate of Letters.

In 1981, Michael Birt was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales a position which he was to hold for eleven years. During his tenure, he steered

that university on a course that has transformed it from “Sydney’s second university’ into one of the leading universities in this country. Under his leadership, the University of New South Wales was to become a most successful research institution and a leader in the recruitment of overseas full-fee paying students. The University earns nearly 40% of its total budget from fees, the commercial provision of services, through investments and through competitive external grants.

Michael Birt is a prolific writer and a consummate public speaker. His writings and speeches on a range of educational issues especially concerning the divide between universities and colleges of advanced education did much to set, and then to influence, the agenda which in 1989 resulted in the colleges of advanced education in New South Wales being either absorbed into one of the eight existing universities or, in the case of Charles Sturt University, the establishment of a new non-metropolitan, multi-campus university. Earlier, Michael Birt, as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wollongong, had led the negotiations which led to the incorporation of the Wollongong Institute of Education into the University of Wollongong. The task of forming a university with a commitment to research and postgraduate studies from two well established but highly competitive colleges of advanced education which hitherto had been essentially vocational institutions with an emphasis on undergraduate teaching was fraught with problems. Michael Birt was one of the few people in Australia capable of tackling these problems. With the support of a conscientious interim Board of Governors, and the University of New South Wales as the “academic sponsor” for the new university, Michael Birt helped to put in place the structures, by-laws, rules, policies, and procedures which guide life at Charles Sturt University today. In particular, he put in place the inaugural professoriate of the new university including the conditions for such appointments. He played a leading role in the selection and entry on duty of the foundation Vice-Chancellor for the new university. Michael Birt did not hesitate to enlist his colleagues at the University of New South Wales to help him with the establishment of the new university. Senior members of the faculty of the University of New South Wales served willingly on the committees and working parties of the new university.

Early in his career Michael Birt demonstrated his belief in the international aspects of education and research by studying and working in the United Kingdom. Since that time, he has played a major role in increasing cooperation between Australian universities and universities throughout the world, especially through his work as a member of the Council of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. In addition he became a member of the Administrative Board of the International Association of Universities whose members represent more than 120 countries. When the Pacific Rim University Presidents Association was founded in 1991, Michael Birt was an automatic choice to serve on the Board. He also served on the Planning Committee for the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and on its Council since its foundation in 1988, bringing to that institution the wealth of experience and enthusiasm that he had brought to the University of Wollongong and Charles Sturt University. He has also served as a member of the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee since 1975, as Deputy Chairman in 1982 and 1983 and Chairman in 1984 and 1985.

Mr Chancellor, it is with pleasure that I present to you, on behalf of the University, Lindsay Michael Birt, Officer of the Order of Australia and Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Bachelor of Agricultural Science, Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Melbourne, Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Oxford, Honorary Doctor of Letters of the University of Wollongong, Honorary Doctor of Laws of the University of Sheffield, Honorary Doctor of Science of the University of New South Wales, Honorary Doctor of Science of the University of Queensland, Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological

Sciences and Engineering, Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management, educator, and dedicated friend of Charles Sturt University, for admission to the degree of Doctor of the University (*honoria causa*)

**Dated this Eleventh Day of May One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Five**