

**Speech of the President of the Senate, Fred de Graaf, at the occasion of the inauguration of the First Contact Memorial on Monday 27 May 2013, also marking the commencement of National Reconciliation Week 2013.**

Elders of Mapoon,  
Traditional owner families,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ms. Wensley, Governor of Queensland,  
Mr. Kempton, Assistant Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Affairs,  
Ms. Ruigrok, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Australia,  
Mister Mayor, Peter Guivarra,  
Dear Friends,

A long trip. That is what it takes to get from the Netherlands to here.  
But again it is absolutely worth it.

I remember having the same feeling when I was at this exact spot in October 2006. I am grateful to be back here, in this beautiful place surrounded by the most extraordinary nature and especially by the most wonderful of people.

When in my office in The Hague in the Netherlands, I actually get reminded of this land on a daily basis. Because in one of the galleries of the Senate, rather prominently, we display a series of drawings of Aboriginal artists. These colourful and expressive prints have been decorating one of the walls since 2006, the year we commemorated 400 years of Dutch-Australian relations. Back then, a unique print portfolio was put together in token of the special role played by the earliest inhabitants of Australia, in the early contacts with the, at times, abrasive Europeans.

During the celebrations of 400 years of Dutch-Australian relations we organized many commemorative, though temporary, events and exchanges. Today, we inaugurate a memorial that captures the beginnings of Dutch-Australian relations; a memorial that really cements our centuries-long bilateral history. Indeed, with this First Contact Memorial our relations gain a sense of permanence.

It is a great honour to be here today at this important occasion. That the long trip needed to get here from the Netherlands is worth every single inch, is not a new insight. Far from. And as we all know very well, I am by no means the first Dutchman travelling across the globe to reach these soils. Such honour and privilege will forever be reserved for the crew of the *Duyfken*. That small yacht of the Dutch East Indian Company that made its landfall here in 1606, skippered by Captain Willem Janszoon. He was the first European to explore this coast line and set foot on this beautiful corner of the vast land mass now known as Australia. A land inhabited already for many thousands of years. The *Duyfken* became a first point of contact between two cultures that back then were sometimes poles apart.

Contacts between people is what this is all about. Willem Janszoon's journey and arrival here at the closeby Pennefather river constitute, as far as we know, the first contact between the inhabitants of Australia and the inhabitants of Europe. It was my predecessor Ms. Yvonne Timmerman-Buck, who in 2006 proposed a monument for this historic happening. Her suggestion was not to have it *only* represent a historical encounter that occurred four centuries ago, but especially to have it *also* symbolize the good relations of the present and those of the future. This idea was picked up by the traditional owners, by successive Dutch Ambassadors, by Honorary Consul Kasper Kuiper, by the Government of Queensland and by important enterprises active in this area. I am extremely proud to be back here today to help unveil the result of this

fruitful cooperation. Before I go on I would like to thank all those who played important roles in realizing this unique project.

In 2006, one of the events in the framework of 400 years Dutch-Australian relations was a 9 month, 12,000 km voyage of a replica of the Duyfken to every state of Australia. With this memorial, the voyage of the Duyfken will be eternalized as a symbol reflecting the centuries of constructive, positive and strong bilateral relations that followed. And hopefully will follow still. The voyage and the activities of the Duyfken have provided us with an appealing historical narrative. And we hope that generations of Australians and Europeans alike will have the opportunity to learn about this shared piece of history.

Of course, a shared history always has several sides and historical developments tend to get interpreted in various ways, depending from what perspective you look at them. Different narratives exist side by side. And this is also true with regard to the First Contact. Today is a milestone in Dutch-Australian relations, but today is also the start of a National Reconciliation Week. We are standing here rather close to "Cape Keerweer". The name "Keerweer" did not come about by random choice. At the time of the Duyfken's voyage, many Dutch sailors, approaching this Cape, decided to make a U-turn. Because of the local resistance. It was a very effective and understandable resistance!

This cape provides us thus with another important narrative, one that is just as passionately remembered. A narrative that shows us that throughout the centuries, interests have not always been harmonious, at times they have even been conflictual. The memorial inaugurated today stands just as well for these narratives. It tells the story of the local people, the importance of these surroundings for them and the way that they have experienced the First Contact.

My hope is that, with this memorial, we can cherish all these different narratives. That we can pass them on with enthusiasm from generation to generation, both in Australia and in Europe. And that we can do so by pointing to the present and to the future. By pointing to the excellent relations we maintain today and hopefully tomorrow.

Once more, I would like to thank all having made this wonderful occasion possible.