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MEDIA RELEASE DATE: 20 October 2024

KING CHARLES III JOINS BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS AT NSW PARLIAMENT

His Majesty King Charles III visited the Parliament of NSW today following the official launch event of a major exhibition charting the 200-year history of the Legislative Council. He addressed officials, members of Parliament and distinguished guests at a celebratory luncheon, which showcased highlights from the program of events and activities that has commemorated the Council's Bicentenary.

The Parliament of NSW was honoured to welcome King Charles III today, during His Majesty and Queen Camilla's official visit to Australia.

Arriving shortly before midday, His Majesty was escorted from Parliament's Macquarie Street entrance in an official party led by the Usher of the Black Rod, through the Fountain Court exhibition space, to the Strangers' Function Room, where 200 guests and awaiting media were asked to stand for The King's arrival.

Attendees including Her Excellency The Hon. Margaret Beazley AC KC were gathered to celebrate the Legislative Council's Bicentenary and the launch of the major exhibition, *Legacy & Evolution – 200 Years of the NSW Legislative Council*.

Addressing the gathering, His Majesty congratulated the Council on its Bicentenary and its contributions to the state's progress.

His Majesty remarked, "Having been with you for your 150th anniversary, I am delighted and proud to be able to return the Parliament of New South Wales to celebrate the occasion of your Bicentenary. This place and the people within it, have continued to uphold strong representative traditions".

The King presented the President of the Legislative Council, the Hon Ben Franklin MLC, with a gift of an hourglass, engraved with the Royal Coat of Arms and an inscription memorialising his visit. Hourglasses are used in the Council chamber during parliamentary proceedings to time business such as divisions. The hourglass will be on display during public tours of the chamber.

A select group of individuals who have played a significant role in the Bicentenary celebrations were presented to speak with His Majesty:

- the Clerk of the Parliaments, David Blunt AM
- artist and creator of Bicentenary Aboriginal artwork *Ngurra Jagun*, Kim Healey
- the winner of the inaugural NSW Parliament Regional Public Speaking Competition for high school students, Sophia Huckel of Blue Mountains Grammar School
- the Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and the Hon Damien Tudehope MLC, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council.

The Hon Ben Franklin MLC, President of the Legislative Council, said "His Majesty's visit was the perfect culmination of our year-long celebration of the Bicentenary of the Legislative Council. We are deeply grateful for the honour of his presence and for the opportunity to share our commemorative program with him."

It is the latest in a 70-year history of Royal visits to the Parliament of NSW, which enjoys an ongoing connection to the Crown via the state's system of constitutional monarchy.

During the first Royal Tour to Australia in 1954, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visited Australia's 'Mother Parliament', making an address in the Legislative Council chamber – the first occasion on which the Sovereign had opened the Parliament of any Australian jurisdiction. Her Late Majesty returned in 1992 to open the 50th Parliament of NSW.

This morning's proceedings mark His Majesty's second visit to NSW Parliament and first as sovereign. His Majesty previously visited on the Legislative Council's 150th anniversary in 1974, when he presented the Council with the gift of a Black Rod.

Fifty years on, the Legislative Council has been marking its Bicentenary year with a diverse and exciting program of events. Today's exhibition launch follows a highly successful series of public seminars, regional roadshows, a concert series and the unveiling of a major Aboriginal artwork, with a Bicentenary Conference still to come in December.

The *Legacy & Evolution – 200 Years of the NSW Legislative Council* Bicentenary Exhibition extends across five walls of Parliament's Fountain Court and Reconciliation Wall exhibition space. It charts two centuries of democracy in NSW through dynamic and informative displays.

The exhibition is open to the public in the Parliament's Fountain Court until 13 December. It can be viewed on weekdays, 9am to 5pm.

Public tours of the chamber are available on Mondays and Fridays, at 11.30am and 1.30pm.

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