

## **Australian Antarctic Research Conference Opening**

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Stand on one of those still moments in the vast Antarctic landscape when the wind has stopped and all there is around you is a vast landscape of ice, sea and sky and you glimpse a different type of time.

The slow time of geological history. The time of glaciers and ice cores. Time that moves so slowly, space so vast that your small fast human life is without consequence. Your heartbeat counts down life in beats per minute. Things here move in cm per year.

Geological time and human time travel on different planes.

Yet here in our time the fast frenetic, energetic lives we live are synchronising the clocks of the planets. Our impact is so great that we have sped up geological time. It is accelerating towards human time. Ice is retreating, thawing, currents are changing, acidity is increasing, temperatures are warming, species are moving. Everything is moving.

The clock hands of nature are being turned by human hands. The hands are being turned toward midnight when the bell tolls for the planet.

That is why we are gathered here today because if we act now we might still be able to stop those hands reaching the top of the hour. We might yet be able to slow geological time down again and resume our inconsequential existence on the planet so all of nature can live and human society won't be overwhelmed by the rising tide of climate change.

We gather here in a university because universities were born as places of hope. They have their origins in the monasteries of the Middle Ages when they nurtured knowledge through the dark ages. They are places that have held out against the black tides of history and where even today the values we share with colleagues unite us when our countries are divided.

These are places our young people come with a belief that better is possible. We owe it to them to keep that flame alive.

Today we gather from across scholarly boundaries because our times require unique collaborations and unprecedented action. The Antarctic community is here today. As a University we are delighted to be a place where we can convene.

We need to get the truth out, not because we are confident the world's leaders will listen, because we aren't, but because we believe in the power of people. Universities have never been there for leaders, for leaders tend to fear them, fear the power of the truths that come from them, fear their freedom. The COP Summit meeting in a fossil fuels capital does not inspire confidence. Questions are being asked about the effectiveness of these gatherings.

We are here because we believe if we enlarge our understanding of the world and communicate it with clarity and conviction it will create change. It is ideas whose time have come and truths that change history far more than leaders and armies or lobbyists.

I hope the news from this conference and all the continuing works that occurs will produce a different climate change - a change in the climate of opinion about the need for radical action by every person, company, institution and government.