

Linda Jakobson, Remarks at China Matters National Meeting's Welcome Dinner  
Canberra, 21 May 2015

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for joining us this evening. Thank you, Andrew Parker, for hosting us and thank you especially for PwC's support of China Matters. PwC is a key sponsor of China Matters as is also Rio Tinto. I am delighted to have Rio Tinto's Senior Advisor Tim Lane with us tonight and tomorrow. Without this support from Rio Tinto and PwC, China Matters could not exist. While we are on the topic of 'thank you', I am grateful too to the Australian China Council for support for this inaugural meeting, and to my meeting partners, the Australian Centre on China in the World, headed by Geremie Barme, and the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, headed by Michael Wesley. Both Wesley and Barme are advisory council members of China Matters.

It feels somewhat unreal to finally be standing here welcoming you to the 1<sup>st</sup> national meeting of China Matters. This all started as a book idea about 18 months ago. Bates Gill and I, two non-Australians who moved to this country having previously worked on China-related issues together, at times mused that the discussion in Australia about China tends to be so black-n-white, when in reality there is so much grey to consider when trying to decipher what is happening within China, and when trying to understand China's external actions. As for Australia-China relations, heaps and heaps of nuance is called for. So, we decided to write a book together, with the hope that we could describe some of those grey zones and provide some of that nuance. We were very much encouraged by the three individuals who later became the three other board

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directors of China Matters – Warwick Smith, Stephen FitzGerald and Frances Adamson. They said that such a book is called for, a book that is not intended to be an academic piece of work but rather written for any one who wants to understand a bit more about the extremely complex country that China is today, and the increasingly complicated and multifaceted relationship that Australia has with China. The working title for our book is “China – Getting it right for Australia.”

But China Matters has now expanded to much more than a book project. Since I established this not-for-profit it has developed into a public policy initiative. Our intention is to serve as a catalyst for a more nuanced discussion in Australia about China's rise and the implications for Australia, and promote sound policy. We are independent of any institution and we have a strict policy focus on Australia-China relations.

Obviously there are many kinds of discussions to be had about China. Australia, in my view, needs them all, both in the public space and behind closed doors. Since moving to this country in 2011 – hired by Michael Wesley by the way – I have been struck by the depth of the gulf between those Australians who see China through a lens of stark scepticism and those Australians who view China through the rosier of lenses. In every country a gulf exists between security and business interests. It is natural. But based on my experiences in Europe and the United States this gulf is unusually deep in Australia. These opposing China-constituencies operate in

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Australia nearly entirely without interacting. This can hardly be in Australia's national interests. So, since founding China Matters, this has become the second of my goals, to bring together members of the various constituencies to discuss the thorny, the really tough issues related to China. I am encouraged not only by the support of a diverse group of distinguished Australians who are my fellow board directors or sit on China Matters' advisory council – and this evening I extend my sincere thanks to them all. I am also extremely encouraged – even humbled – by the desire of senior corporate and government representatives to participate in the inaugural meeting. Australia's diplomatic skills are bound to be severely tested as the relationship between China and the United States grows more complex and contentious, as I think it inevitably will. The front page article on this morning's *The Australian* attests to this. Some degree of comprehension of how others among the diverse China-constituencies in Australia view the sticky issues and a desire to work out reasonable ways forward would be beneficial to the enormous challenge that lies ahead for any Australian government. And with that I finish my own remarks about Why China Matters? And now I have the pleasure to introduce our evening's keynote speaker. Mr Tom Switzer.