

**The Honourable Alan Stockdale**

**Former Treasurer of Victoria**

**Melbourne Town Hall**

**Thursday 15 June 2006**

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I am honoured to have this opportunity to pay tribute to Ian Little but, like everyone who knew Ian or worked with him, I am dismayed and saddened to be attending this celebration of his life in June, 2006.

I worked with Ian from 1994 to 1999 – whilst he was Deputy Secretary of the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance and, from 1998 whilst he was Secretary of the Department.

Of course, Ian's family will miss him most but those of us who knew his contribution to Victoria, and indeed to Australia, are saddened that we have been deprived of his wise counsel, especially at such a young age.

Ian was recruited to the Treasury by Mike Vertigan. We were looking for someone who would be capable of taking over from Mike when he retired. From the very beginning it was clear that we had found someone who would not only carry on the tradition of excellence Mike had developed but actually build on that foundation and lead by example. Ian quickly established himself as a leader – intellectually and in every other sense.

Ian brought tremendous integrity to the process of public service advice. He was palpably honest and straightforward in his dealings with everyone. That might sound like a basic requirement for any senior manager but bureaucracies tend to abound with game-playing Sir Humphries for whom the battle of wits and the subtle double-talk is a way of life. When you dealt with Ian Little you knew that his attention was always on the best possible outcome for the people of Victoria.

But that is only the beginning of what I mean by integrity. Ian brought intellectual rigour to analysis of policy and public administration. He was fact-driven – he wanted to know what really happened not just what someone thought was going on. I remember when the so-called “Asian meltdown” occurred, it had an adverse impact on the Victorian economy but not as much as we expected. We wanted to know

why. Ian initiated a research project that he personally supervised. He concluded that the reforms of the 1980's and 1990's had made industry more adaptable and when markets in Asia contracted, businesses simply went out and found new markets in Europe and, especially, the US. He was genuinely interested in public policy and he applied his powerful intellect to analysis and real solutions to issues.

As Deputy Secretary, and, especially as Secretary, Ian mastered an enormous range of issues. Despite the breadth of issues involved, I cannot recall ever raising a question Ian couldn't answer. Management and reform depended on Ian's work. Treasury was like a good wife to the Premier's Department husband. Premier's was allowed the illusion that it was driving everything but, in most cases, it was Ian Little and Treasury doing the work on which the decisions were based.

Ian was universally liked. Especially in a radically reformist Government, it is hard not to step on toes. Ian drove people to perform at their best, he challenged conventional wisdom and the "this is the way we do it" philosophy but he made no enemies. Everyone I know liked Ian Little.

Ian was also universally respected because he treated everyone with dignity. He gave people chances and he helped them fulfil their aspirations. We often talked about the need to lift Treasury's analytical capability. Late in my term as Treasurer he said to me that it had taken longer than either of us wanted but he thought that the analytical capacity was now first-rate. Typically of Ian, he commented that largely the same people were doing the analysis but that by leadership, inspiration and training they were doing a great job and even enjoying their work more.

Ian helped give Victoria a leadership position amongst the States. Ian commanded huge respect at Premiers' conferences. I used to laugh when the Premier and I were battling with the Premiers and Treasurers from other States but, at the same time, I could see their public servants going to Ian to ask for explanations and advice.

I believed that the Grants Commission formula for revenue-sharing across the States was dressed up as science but was actually the equivalent of examining the entrails of a chicken – and said so. Ian saw mastering the so-called reasoning of the Grants Commission as a way to influence the debate and the outcomes. At Premiers' Conferences and meetings of the States, the norm became that, in any issue, everyone would look to Ian Little for explanations and guidance on how the system

worked. He commanded respect because he had the intellect to understand the system, had done the work no-one else had done and could cogently explain his knowledge.

Ian attracted good quality people and he brought out the best in them. It is always dangerous to single out any individual but I remember Ian saying that he wanted to put the Treasury Economist in charge of the Water Reform Unit. I had a high regard for Richard Clark but was concerned about Richard's lack of management experience. Ian championed Richard, I accepted his advice and Ian was right. In an environment where there were dozens of high achievers who drove major reforms, Richard managed water reforms that could have been a political minefield, achieved major market-based reform, ensured equitable outcomes for consumers and did it all with a flair that proved up Ian's judgement and his faith in Richard.

Ian was logical, research-driven, hard-working and cogent but he was diplomatic. He could communicate effectively with everyone in a context where there were few shrinking violets.

The Budget and Expenditure Review Committee (affectionately known as "BERC") was resourced by Ian and his team. This was a Cabinet Committee in which a group of senior Ministers "beat up" other Ministers and senior Department managers to get guarantees that they would meet Treasury's annual Budget targets. Ian did the quiet work behind the scenes to make the process work but also to have it at least tolerated by other Departments.

I was elected in 1992 in a crisis – crises are not things Treasurer's welcome. We had no crises whilst Ian Little managed the Budget.

I have spoken about Ian's professional qualities on the assumption that others will pay tribute to Ian Little, the man. His abundant professional achievements reflect the qualities of the man - an outstanding human being. Ian was a fundamentally good person who won respect because he gave everyone else respect.

In public life, families make sacrifices. In closing I want to extend my warmest sympathy to Ian's family – to Ian's wife Clair, their two daughters, Natalie and Kristina and to the rest of Ian's family. I thank you for supporting your husband, your father in serving his community. He did it as well as it can be done.