Eighty-eight years on, what is it that brings us together once again today? We come together today, because eighty-eight years ago on the 25th April, 1915, troops from a young nation fought together and helped to create a strong and lasting sense of nationhood. Today we stop, to take a pause in our lives and reflect on the meaning of the events of Gallipoli and to pay our respects to all those who have fallen in war.

On this day, over a hundred thousand men lost their lives on a beach that would one day become known as ANZAC Cove. As the first Queenslanders from the ninth battalion landed at 4.29 am they were immediately confronted with a single shot. This was followed by a rapid onslaught from the Turks waiting in the hills above as the remaining ships approached the shores.

Many men died on the very boats that brought them to the battlefield, before even setting foot on the shore. The operation was a disaster. The British had given incorrect instructions, and instead of landing on a flat beach, the Anzacs landed in a position where they faced steep cliffs and unrelenting enemy fire.

Those that survived the initial landing ordeal found themselves in a long and arduous campaign of trench warfare. The ANZACS endured shelling, sniper attacks and suffered many ailments due to the appalling conditions in the trenches and lack of sanitation, food and fresh water.

Yet it was here in the trenches of Gallipoli that an Australian legend was born. A legend born not of decisive military victory, but of courage and human triumph against terrible odds. A legend born of sacrifice and patriotism at a time when every Australian who fought in WW1 was a volunteer, a time when Australia’s population was only 5 million, yet over 400,000 men joined the Australian Imperial Force.

The sacrifice of the ANZAC’s eighty-eight years ago is now as meaningful as ever to all Australians, both young and old. It reminds us all of the tragedy and horror of war and the senseless loss of life of so many, especially the young. Perhaps without war, some may argue, we may not be here today celebrating the freedoms we enjoy for which many Australians have given their lives to preserve. The right to address an assembly like this one, openly and without fear of persecution might have vanished. The right to take to the streets and protest against yet another war and human rights abuses may have already faced extinction.

The ANZAC legend has become a central element of Australian culture and tradition. As the young people of the nation we must look at the ANZAC legend and ask what does it really mean? And how does it apply to our lives today?
Looking to the original Anzac Day reminds us of the tragedy and waste of war. It also reminds us about fighting for the high ideals and beliefs of freedom and justice for all. But beyond this, we are reminded that every generation may face the most appalling of choices. Undoubtedly, the greatest message and gift from the Anzac legend is the value and importance of honour and integrity in our own lives. Stories of how the Turkish and Australian soldiers called a stop to war to bury their dead, and the respect they showed in doing so, have become a part of Australian folklore. The Turkish and Australian soldiers walked out into no man’s land during the cessation of fire, swapped food and cigarettes, shook hands and talked, before returning to their trenches. Even today, there is still a lasting bond between the Australians and Turks. We have great respect for the way both sides committed the deed of war with honour. Each year both countries join together at the dawn of every Anzac Day, to pay their respects to all the fallen at ANZAC Cove.

To whom are the issues of war, freedom, sacrifice and most importantly, lasting peace, more relevant than the future leaders of our world, today’s youth? Even as I speak the youth of this nation are faced with the evil of war. Like previous generations, the youth of today must now confront the enormity of the moral decisions and judgements which must be made.

The only way to make informed, wise decisions for the future is based on a knowledge and understanding, not only of current events, but also of the lessons which the past can and must hopefully one day teach us. Amidst the fear and horror that is war, it is all too easy to lose our sense of our common humanity and picture an enemy whose life, feelings and family are somehow worth less than our own. It is all too easy to look for scapegoats and simplistic solutions. To forget that any conflict involves real people, who feel and love and bleed, just like us, and who can so easily become the targets of our hatred and ignorance.

Therefore, I urge all young people to look to the ANZAC legend and what it can teach us about both war and peace, but above all how it serves to remind us about our shared, common humanity. We must examine the facts carefully and like our Anzac forebears, we must seek to always behave with honour and integrity. We must look to the lessons and knowledge that the ANZAC tradition gives us. We must use it wisely to make the difficult decisions both in our own lives and as citizens of our free democratic country, to make decisions for a better future.

Lest we forget.