This year is the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Sir John Crawford, after whom the Crawford Fund is named. Neil Andrew and Denis Blight believed that tonight’s dinner provided an appropriate occasion for Sir John’s achievements to be remembered. I am honoured to do so. I worked with Sir John for many years, first in negotiations with the EEC in 1960 on the Common Agricultural Policy. Our collaboration was very close during my years with the overseas aid agency, culminating in the establishment of ACIAR in 1982.

Sir John was a truly great Australian. His achievements, I believe, compare favourably with those of his better known contemporaries, for example ‘Nugget’ Coombs. It is disappointing that a full-scale biography has not been commissioned1.

What is so extraordinary about Sir John is that he was a visionary; a visionary committed to realising his vision, something seemingly in short supply in today’s Australia. At the same time he had an acute sense of what was practical, what was achievable. His lifetime interest was the development of public policy, policy rooted in an understanding of long-run political and economic trends. Among his diverse successes were the harnessing of agricultural economics to the development of policy for Australian food and fibre production; the conception and implementation of Australian overseas trade policy; as a builder of institutions; as an academic and university administrator; as a manager of government departments; and as a trusted adviser to successive governments.

Given my own background it is perhaps not surprising that I see Sir John’s greatest achievements as being in the international sphere, among them the conclusion of the 1957 Trade agreement with Japan and implementation of the Green Revolution in India2.

The approach that Sir John brought to the Japanese negotiations was in line with his brilliant, prescient essay published in 1938. In it Sir John challenged every major assumption upon which our approach to world affairs was then based. He argued that to attempt to thwart Japan’s industrialisation would lead to conflict and war. Thus he was critical of Australian support for UK trade policy toward Japan through the 1930s. He gave weight to the fact that already one-quarter of our

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2For information on relations with Japan and India, see especially the essays by Peter Drysdale and W. David Hopper on which I have drawn.
trade was with the Pacific. He was the first to
describe the ‘Far East’ as the ‘Near North’. He
was sceptical, even at that date, of Australian
confidence that we could rely for our security on
what were later described as ‘great and powerful
friends’.

It says much for the courage of the Menzies
government that it would contemplate, let alone
conclude, an agreement which among other im-
portant steps extended most-favoured-nation tariff
treatment to Japan, the still despised and hated
enemy. Much business opinion was also strongly
opposed. Sir John had as well to convince the
Japanese that, given our past record, we were
sincere in advancing generous proposals. The
process of persuasion and negotiation took three
years. That treaty laid the foundations for future
agricultural-based prosperity. At the time farm
products were 80% of total exports and produc-
tion was increasing. We were as dependent on
agriculture, especially wool, in 1957 as we are on
minerals today.

That Sir John succeeded owed everything to his
far-sightedness, patience, persistence and powers
of persuasion.

Modest, quietly spoken, physically unimposing,
Sir John was easily underestimated. In fact he had
a formidable will and considerable self confi-
dence. All who knew him have testified to his
brilliant chairing of small groups. Somehow he
gained the result he wanted without alienating
those who may have initially favoured a different
course. Never losing sight of his goals, he was
ready to build on small advances. His judgement
was not distorted by vanity or self-indulgence or
arrogance. Never pompous, never ruffled, he did
not ‘put down’ anyone. The result was that he
engendered great respect and loyalty. He was also
a superb judge of talent and gathered around him
in each of his endeavours associates of the highest
ability.

Sir John was a superb diplomat. His skills with the
Japanese were repeated with the Indian govern-
ment. Over time he persuaded it to provide the
resources that enabled the Green Revolution to be
taken up, just in time as it happened, to avoid ever
more devastating famines. For over ten years Sir
John, on behalf of the World Bank, visited India
annually to review and thus help to keep on track
and adjust as necessary the agricultural revolution
under way. To this day his contribution is ac-
claimed in India.

Sir John developed a considerable and lasting
respect for the top officials of the World Bank. It
was through his long association with the Bank
that he became so deeply involved with the Con-
sultative Group for International Agricultural
Research (CGIAR). The CGIAR was, and is, in
essence a consortium to coordinate the work of,
and secure funding for, an expanding number of
international agricultural research institutes. From
its inception the CGIAR was assisted by a Tech-
ical Advisory Committee (TAC) which, for
many years, was chaired by Sir John to great
acclaim from all involved—government and other
donors, centre directors and scientists from among
the world’s best.

Under his leadership many new institutes were
created. In Sir John’s view it was essential to
widen the range of disciplines to be addressed if
food production, especially in developing coun-
tries, was to accelerate. One such was the
International Livestock Centre for Africa, ILCA,
created in 1974. Sir John was the first chairman of
its governing board. The late Professor Derek
Tribe was a member of ILCA’s Board of Trustees
at that time and he and Sir John developed a
lasting respect and affection for one another. Tribe
created the Crawford Fund in 1988 to honour the
name of Sir John by promoting in Australia
knowledge of, and funding for, the CGIAR cen-
tres. This annual conference is one way the Fund
continues to do so.

Sir John was not a natural scientist but through his
leadership of the CGIAR he was alive to all the
scientific disciplines promotion of which is essen-
tial to achieve ecologically sustainable food
production. Thus he played a leading role in
fathering one of the most vital, but less widely
known CGIAR institutes, today’s Bioversity
International. Its work bears directly on that of
this evening’s distinguished speaker, Professor
Stephen Hopper, Director of the Royal Botanic
Gardens, Kew.

I’m quite certain that Sir John would share Profes-
sor Hopper’s vision of a world at a turning point.
As Professor Hopper argues, maintenance of plant
diversity has become essential if food production
is to expand sustainably while adequately nourish-
ing the earth’s burgeoning population. Professor
Hopper, an Australian by the way, is uniquely
qualified to explain why that is so. In addition to
his primary role at Kew he holds many others
including visiting professorships and fellowships.

Professor Hopper is a very welcome contributor to
this conference.\footnote{The presentation is included here, commencing on page 92.}
John Crawford died without male issue in 1248. So part of his estate went to his daughter Margaret. Margaret married Sir Archibald de Douglas. The other part of the estate went to his other daughter, name unknown. She married Sir David de Lindsay of Wauchopdale.