

Speech by German Ambassador Gerhard Thiedemann, Wellington, 17.11.17

Dear **Alexander von Humboldt** Fellows,
distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to extend a very warm **welcome** to all of you to Wellington. As the German Ambassador to New Zealand I am delighted to welcome also the **Alexander von Humboldt Foundation – alumni** from Australia and deliver greetings from my dear colleague, Ambassador Dr. Anna Prinz in Canberra.

Let me first say **Thank You** to your AvH – NZ chairpersons Prof. Eamonn **O'Brien** and Dr. Andrew **Matthews** and all collaborators involved in the preparation of this event. A word of gratitude goes as well to our good partner, the **Royal Society of New Zealand** for kind hospitality. Last but not least Thank you to **AvH headquarters** in Bonn, represented here by Dr. Katrin **Amian** and our outgoing **DAAD-lecturer Dr. Anna Bauer** in Auckland who did also a lot for AvH in recent years.

Dear Alexander von Humboldt Fellows,
needless to say, that you are part of the **best German science** cooperation scheme; in my words: AvH is a bit similar to the **Mercedes** – the best Germany can offer; financed to a large extent by our **taxpayers money** –
My government is convinced: this is a **good investment**.

As Humboldtians, you are members of **one big family** – that consists of more than 28,000 academics. Like in **every family**, you should **always** be part of that family – at least we see it that way. Like in every **good family**, you will maintain contact with your relatives in every stage of life – irrespective of whether you work at a university, in another academic institution or even in business, whether you receive another doctorate or become a professor and wherever you live.

A **substantial basis** for your **scientific community** is ensured by the **AvH-platform** that provides the infrastructure to easily establish contacts, share ideas and do common research.

Of course, the **alumni event** this weekend is an important part of this exchange as well. **Face-to-face contacts** are still valuable in the 21. Century and often form the basis of trustful and productive cooperation. That is valid as well **in science as in diplomacy**. As the **AvH - family** spans the globe you can benefit even more. Members in more than 140 countries with a Germany affiliation encourage collaboration between the most excellent academics worldwide.

Due to their **different cultural, political and educational backgrounds** these scholars may have **various approaches** and ideas which should result in flourishing **common research**. By **supporting you**, dear Humboldtians from Australia and New Zealand, the **AvH-Foundation** provides the opportunity to be part of this **unique scheme**. This enlarges the potential for scientific contributions for a sustainable future in our changing world with manifold challenges we face right now.

I encourage you to **stay active with AvH and science made in Germany !**

You are here to discuss challenges regarding **“Our Changing World in the South Pacific”**. As German **ambassador to NZ** I am also accredited to **6 Pacific Island** nations up to Kiribati 4500 km north of Wellington. From my visits in that region – the pacific has a **surface** comparable to that **of the moon** - I know about huge problems of these **little states** and the **maritime environment**.

It is known to all of us: **the world** – and also the South Pacific – is **changing** enormously and in many ways. **Natural disasters** caused by the global climate change affect not only societies, but politics and the economy as well.

These days **Germany** is host to the world climate conference **COP 23 in Bonn**. Under a **Fiji presidency** the sorrows and interests of the Pacific nations play an important role there. Let us hope for **wise conclusion** for the **benefit of mankind**.

Global mobility allows for **migration** which serious effects also in our home countries. Integration - well done or failed - has enormous consequences for the wellbeing of people. **Problems** are multilayered and so are possible **strategies**.

Thus, **“Our Changing World in the South Pacific”** is a topic allowing for the coverage of a broad range of disciplines which should be reflected in depth in your lectures and discussions.

To give a practical example of **German maritime research in the Pacific** I'd like to mention the regular voyages of the **flag ship of our research fleet, “the SONNE”** in this region. 2017 “the SUN” visited Auckland and Freemantle harbor for logistics and for “open ship days”. Many interested citizens, the media and natural scientists came aboard to learn about the ships mission.

Another fine example: The **“Falling Walls Lab”** is an opportunity for early career researchers and innovative thinkers to share their initiative or project from all disciplines, and be in the competition to win a trip to the “Falling Walls Lab” final in Berlin. 2017 three New Zealanders and two participants from the Pacific Islands presented their ideas at the regional Falling Walls Lab in Australia in September and one achieved the third place for his medical concept regarding knee replacements.

“Falling walls lab” by the way recalls the tumbling down of the Berlin wall 1989, which opened up hearts and minds for a better future.

Our AvH - alumni event today, is another highlight after **4 decades of fruitbearing scientific collaboration** between Germans and both New Zealanders and Australians. 2017, we celebrate the **40th anniversary** of bilateral **Science and Technology agreements** concluded between our governments. 1977 was the start of many common success stories.

We can **celebrate this partnership** as an important pillar of our bilateral dense network of collaboration. I quote some fascinating figures :

30.000 of my countrymen live in NZ and **3000** New Zealanders in Germany; **200** German scientists have a permanent job in NZ universities and institutes, **15 %** of NZ scientists cooperate with German academia. **I encourage you all** to use these strong ties for even more common projects in the future !

Early November the **Federal President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier**, came for state visits to Australia and New Zealand highlighting the relationship between real value partners. Unfortunately we could not combine his stay in Wellington with your event today. As members of the AvH - family you know that German heads of state traditionally have a strong relationship with AvH.

I guess the one or the other of you has participated in the annual meetings with our President. His last AvH reception was in June 2017 at Bellevue castle in Berlin. It would be worthwhile to plan your next scientific trip to Germany at a date connected to the annual AvH encounter with President Steinmeier.

To conclude : our heads of government have underlined the **strong ties** between Germany, Australia and New Zealand. Those should be even strengthened in the future and you can **contribute to this noble course**.

The **AvH- family** in this region is a **flagship example of this flourishing collaboration**. I wish all of you great continued success with your projects.

My wife and I would be pleased **to welcome you at the German Ambassadors Residence** to enjoy this evening together. Of course a lively intellectual exchange is also desired.

I am only a humble lawyer and diplomat but my wife Dr. Marlies Thiedemann, a microbiologist, is especially keen to hear about your projects.

We'll have the opportunity to have dinner in the neo-Tudor style villa built in 1931 at Belmont Hills in a magnificent garden setting to provide a **favorable environment for German encounters with distinguished guests.**

Last but not least you will be invited to have a delicious glass of German wine or craft beer. You shouldn't miss that.

Dear Humboldtians, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
I hope to see many of you tonight.