

Visit by the Ambassador for France

Hi Excellency, Mr Michel Filhol, Ambassador of France visited Western Australia in March and I hosted the Ambassador's visit at Parliament House. Mr Filhol has been Ambassador for Australia since July 2008.

Mr Filhol is a decorated career diplomat with 34 years in service, with previous international postings including Italy, Czech Republic, Libya, The Netherlands and Singapore.

The Ambassador's distinguished career has been acknowledged several times. Mr Filhol is a Knight in the Order of the Legion of Honour, Knight in the National Order of Merite, and Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau.

The Knight in the Order of the Legion of Honour is a French order established by Napoleon Bonaparte in May 1802. The Order is the highest decoration in France. The National Order of Merite is an Order of State awarded by the President of the French Republic and was founded in 1963 by then President Charles de Gaulle. The Ambassador received this Order for "distinguished civil and military achievements". The Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau is a military and civil Order of the Netherlands which was created in 1892 by the Queen Regent Emma of the Netherlands. The Order is a chivalry order open to "everyone who has earned special merits for society".

It was interesting to learn from the Ambassador that France currently has an observer status in the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC). The IORARC is an international organisation with 18 member states, which includes Australia. It was first established in Mauritius in 1995 and formally launched in March 1997. The Association distributes information on trade and investment, with a view to help the region's business community better understand the obstacles to trade and investment within the region. These information exchanges are intended to serve as a base to expand intra-regional trade. France is excited to be part of this Association. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Western Australia-based agencies and universities are working together to develop strategies for closer involvement in Indian Ocean Rim and IORARC activities.

We swapped stories about the strong influence of France during the early European discovery and mapping of Australia. There are 240 French place names along the Western Australian coast. If history had taken a different turn there was every chance this western third of Australia would have been a French colony.

Also during the Ambassador's official visit to Western Australia, the Ambassador called on the Chief Justice of Western Australia, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth, the Governor of Western Australia, and also held a briefing with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.



Picture: *The President, Hon. Barry House with the Ambassador of France, His Excellency, Mr Michel Filhol.*