

LAUNCH OF LAW WEEK 2009

1pm, Thursday 7 May 2009

**The Hon. Chief Justice Terence Higgins
Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory**

If I may acknowledge the Attorney, the Presidents, the practitioners and anyone else I can think of that starts with the letter P – the People.

Good afternoon and welcome. It is a great pleasure to be with you today. I begin by paying my respects to the Ngunnawal people, the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the land on which we gather and on which this court is built. This time last year, we celebrated the ACT Law Society's 75th anniversary. This year marks yet another diamond anniversary, the 75th anniversary of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory.

Commemorations are well under way, though I am yet to sight a diamond. If anybody has one, they are more than welcome to contribute it. The ceremonial sitting for the 75th anniversary of the Supreme Court on 30 January 2009 was attended by members of the legislative assembly, the judiciary, the magistracy, the legal profession and staff of the law courts, who attended, not just to hear me, of course, but to hear others speak on the achievements of this court during the past 75 years and more specifically and magnificently for the grand unveiling of the new judicial robes, the first robes specifically designed for this Supreme Court.

Since that time both a DVD and book have been produced. The DVD was an A.C.T government initiative and will take the general public through the court's 75 year history. I would like to acknowledge Colin Chandler for his magnificent efforts in the production of that DVD. After spending vast amounts of time looking for information and images he stated and I quote 'The thing that struck me in the research for this video is how people take photographs and film over the years, but discount the real value of what they have and it ends up being lost to posterity. Institutions really should value their heritage and try to keep more of it'. Something we could all bear in mind I think. I also wish to recognise Antoinette Buchanan at the ACT Heritage Library who was of tremendous assistance during the early stages of research.

Next Wednesday, the 13 May will mark the launch of a book entitled 'History of the Court', commissioned to commemorate the 75th anniversary. Numerous people were involved in that endeavour and for that I must offer my thanks to them, particularly Thomson Reuter for sponsoring the publishing of the book, the Bar Association for their contribution and the honourable Jeffrey Miles for writing it and through it sharing some of his knowledge and experience of our jurisdiction.

We must now look to the future. As I do so I can not help but wonder how much longer this building will stay standing. Now, that is a joke. I do not mean that it is going to fall down tomorrow, indeed there is work being done outside to ensure that it won't. But most of you are aware and indeed the Attorney has mentioned the cramped conditions and lack of facilities which we have to endure on a daily basis in

this building. It is acknowledged that a new building is necessary and I too welcome the initiatives in the recently published budget acknowledging that and offering a sum for the preparation of plans for a new court building. We do, first of all, need to work out where it is going to go. We will solve that shortly. It is a significant advance and I acknowledge that the need for the new Supreme Court building has been accepted and accepted genuinely and sincerely by this government and it's predecessor but of course one needs to progress that towards the actual completion of the building itself. Mention has already been made of the increasing workload faced by this court and the prolonged waiting time for hearing and trial dates. I acknowledge those are difficulties probably irreconcilable unless a fifth resident judge is appointed, to that end submissions have been forwarded as the Attorney has acknowledged and I am pleased to note they are received and in consideration.

I conclude on this note. As we celebrate the history of this court we must also look ahead and assess the evolving requirements of this court and that is not simply a new building but also the processes and procedures that we undertake in order to progress matters that come before the court. We need continually to upgrade and examine those, fairly and efficiently, to deliver justice in this territory.

Thank you.