

Legal Practitioners Admission Ceremony

Higgins CJ, Penfold J

Friday 17 October 2008

Court 1 -11:00AM

Speech 2

Ladies and gentlemen who have just been admitted welcome. I pay my respects to the Ngunnawal people, the traditional owners and continued custodians of this land.

On behalf of Justices Gray and Refshauge, who unfortunately can not be with us today, Justice Penfold and I congratulate each of you on your admission. We also welcome those of you who have gathered to witness this special occasion.

The legal profession is in part a self regulating body, for that reason the Legal Profession Admission Board is charged with vetting applications for admission by aspiring practitioners. The review process carried out by the Board ensures that those who are admitted are deemed fit and proper persons, capable of fulfilling the roles and obligations of a legal practitioner. The process in which you have all partaken in the past weeks, to ensure your application for admission was accepted, may at times have seemed arbitrarily tedious and bureaucratic, but those processes ensure that admission to this court is limited to those persons who have attained a particular standard of skill and learning. You may now count yourselves among their number, and should be rightly proud of this achievement.

By virtue of today's admission you have become members of this court, and will be an integral part of the operation of our legal system as members of the legal profession.

Your membership is to a mature profession, complete with its own history and shared tradition. Some have suggested that the emphasis placed on this tradition by the law has made it irrelevant, or out of touch with the realities of today's society. I assure you that this is not the case. If there were ever a place where the reality of society was presented at its most exposed it would be here, in this room, and in the many thousands of others like it around the world.

As practitioners in this court you will see these things. You will, in the course of your practice, see humanity at its most vulnerable, but you will also see it in moments of triumph and resilience. Which ever field you choose to practice in, the realities of today's society will become your reality.

While it may be true that the law and its traditions are elderly, I would strongly reject the notion that it is outdated or that its relevance today is somehow diminished. The law, while relying on rules established through past practice and precedent, represents ideals and notions that are extraordinarily relevant to the times in which we now live.

In fact, the challenges our world now faces provides a unique opportunity for the law and those practicing in it to shape a societal response to issues such as the protection of our environment, personal privacy and freedoms, the safeguarding of human and

animal rights and the containment of the threat of terror. These are challenges that I am confident of the laws ability to meet.

While the capacity in which you may choose to practice is varied, you may for example work as a legal officer for government or a private company, as a specialist solicitor or as a barrister, whichever you choose, your role will always be to help your client access the law. To them the legal terrain may be unfamiliar, or in some cases it may be well trodden (in your first years you may in fact find yourselves representing persons who are more familiar with the courts than you are...) whichever the case, the universal truth will be that to each client their matter is of the greatest importance. So whatever it is that you find yourself working on, remember that its consequence is immeasurable to someone. At that time, when you are acting for these people, you will know that your hard work and study has paid off.

As I have mentioned, the Law Society has a regulatory role, but it is also important to mention that it is a representative body. In this capacity it exists to support members of the profession. Should you find yourself in difficulty; the ACT Law Society represents a wealth of experience and knowledge which you may access.

As the professions newest entrants, again I welcome you, and I wish you all the best of luck. May you find a stimulating, long and rewarding career in the law, and may you have great friends with whom to share that journey.