

Legal Practitioners Admission Ceremony

Speech delivered by Chief Justice Higgins

Friday 20 June 2008

Court 1 -10AM

Ladies and Gentlemen, newly admitted practitioners, on behalf of the ACT Supreme Court and my learned colleagues Justices Gray and Penfold, welcome.

I begin by paying my respects to the Ngunnawal people, the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the land on which we gather this morning.

Today you have gained admission to the legal profession and I congratulate you on that. I understand the commitment required to undertake a study of the law, in fact I did it myself once. I congratulate you on not only the successful completion of that course of study, but also on the pledge you have undertaken today either by oath or affirmation which will see that commitment to the law continue.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome those who have gathered today to celebrate your achievement. On occasions such as this it is important to remember the commitment and support your family and friends have given you, and role they have played in the attainment of your goals.

As diligent newly admitted practitioners I am sure you are all well aware that this year Australia's Highest Court will have appointed to it a new Chief Justice.

The current Chief Justice, Chief Justice Gleeson graduated from the university of Sydney in 1962. His friend, now known as the Honourable Justice Kirby, graduated with him. In a speech reflecting on the appointment of the Chief Justice to the pinnacle of the Australian judiciary, his Honour Justice Kirby recalled the following of his university days with Chief Justice Gleeson, his Honour said, and I quote:

“In 1959, after our first year at the Law School, he proposed, and I agreed, that we should share lecture notes and research together. A bond was forged which we continue today. If it should appear that I am ever so slightly uncertain in subjects such as revenue law and company law, I declare that this is because Murray Gleeson kept from me vital notes on key legal doctrine. If per chance he should ever be seen to stumble in his mastery of Australian constitutional law (now uniquely in his charge) I am sure he will blame me for keeping vital sections - say on the *Engineer's case* - from him. Future researchers of our judicial work will doubtless analyse our respective mastery of legal topics and trace it to our division of the spoils of study forty years ago.”

I use this quote to demonstrate that even those most gifted in the law rely from time to time on the help, advice and companionship of their contemporaries and colleagues.

I am sure all of you have had similar experiences during your time at university, and what I hope to impress upon you today, is that, while the official process of study may be over, these mutually beneficial and rewarding relationships will continue. For the duration of your legal career your colleagues in the law will continue to challenge and

assist you. In addition, you will also have available to you the support of the wider ACT legal community, including the ACT Law Society and Bar Association.

In joining the legal profession you have undertaken to uphold and pursue certain values and ethics. The court relies on you not only to maintain and be led by those principles, but also to endorse and impress on others the importance of them. Should you, however, find yourself in difficulty, there are services offered by the profession that are available to you, including, as I have mentioned, the ACT law society.

As you enter the profession, you come at a time when society is challenged by issues that were not, I imagine, in contemplation when their Honours Chief Justice Gleeson and Justice Kirby stood in a similar position to where you are now seated. As has always been the case, the challenges that confront the law are dictated by those which presently face the community.

The challenges this generation of practitioners face provides a unique opportunity for the law and those practicing it to shape a societal response to issues such as the protection of our environment, containment of terror, safeguarding of human rights. Noting the uniqueness of these times, the privilege that you have been afforded by virtue of your education, and the opportunities that exist for the law, from here, there are many possibilities for greatness.

To return to those young men who in 1959 decided to share notes. One is now distinguished as a great humanitarian and orator, the other has led the nation's highest

court for over 10 years. Both are great jurists and remain, as they were in law school, great friends.

As the professions newest entrants, today that is what I would wish for you, a stimulating, long and rewarding relationship with the law and great friends with whom to share that journey.

I congratulate you again on behalf of myself and my colleagues on your admission and warmly welcome you to the legal profession.