

Hellenic Australian Lawyers Association – Launch of ACT Chapter

15 April 2016

Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory

Chief Justice Murrell

Mr Panna (President of the Hellenic Australian Lawyers Association), Ambassador, Judges, members of the Hellenic Australian Lawyers Association and their friends,

I acknowledge the traditional and continuing custodians of this land and I pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

I was honoured – and rather surprised – to be invited to be the patron of the ACT Chapter of the Hellenic Australian Lawyers Association.

Other than my name, I can claim no Hellenic connection that would warrant the honour. However, as patronage of the Association brings with it the prospect of fabulous food and Greek hospitality, I embrace the opportunity.

When Martin CJ launched the WA Chapter of the Association, his Honour was able to recount travel stories from his frequent trips to Greece.¹ Unfortunately, when I was last in Greece the currency was the drachma!

When Chief Justice Robert French launched the Queensland Chapter of the Hellenic Australian Lawyers Association, his Honour claimed to have no Hellenic qualifications, but then went on to demonstrate an impressive knowledge of the Greek alphabet, Greek tragedy and Greek philosophy.² I cannot emulate that performance.

¹ Wayne Martin AC, 'Address' (Speech delivered at the Launch of the Hellenic Australian Lawyers Association Western Australia Chapter, Supreme Court of Western Australia, 12 February 2016).

² Robert French AC, (Speech delivered at the Queensland Chapter Launch of the Hellenic Australian Lawyers Association Incorporated, Supreme Court of Queensland, 30 January 2015).

At least, I am aware of the strong connection between the philosophies of Ancient Greece and contemporary Western society. The concepts of the rule of law and equality before the law have their origins in Ancient Greece. Aristotle was responsible for the phrase: “The law is reason, free from passion”, made famous when it was quoted in *Legally Blonde*.

It is particularly pleasing that Kyrou J (Patron of the Victorian Chapter) is among us.

Like many migrants today, Kyrou J’s family came to Australia to pursue economic and other opportunities. His Honour’s journey began in a poor farming village in northern Greece. In Australia, he was ostracised because of his migrant background and he was subjected to racist taunts. Despite these disadvantages, he went on to become dux of his high school, he became an eminent solicitor and he is now one of Australia’s most senior and respected judges. His journey is inspiring to all Australians.

I also congratulate the Hellenic lawyers who are present this evening. Each of you has achieved much. Thankfully, our legal profession is no longer “the monochrome club of Anglo-Celtic males”³ that it once was. Finally, it is beginning to reflect the diversity of our community.

Of course, with the exception of indigenous peoples, everyone living in the ACT is a relatively recent migrant. The extensive work of Tamis and Tsolakis, *The History of Greeks in Canberra and District*, reveals that pioneer settlers of Greek ancestry were some of the early non indigenous settlers in the Canberra region, arriving in the 1840s.⁴

These settlers were not necessarily here by choice. Some were here by the order of a court of the British Navy. Seven sailors from the island of

³ Michael Kirby, ‘Legal Professional Ethics in Times of Change’ (1998) 72 *Australian Law Reform Commission Reform Journal* 5, 10.

⁴ Anastasios M Tamis and Demetrios A Tsolakis, *The history of Greeks of Canberra and District* (Greek Orthodox Community and Church of Canberra and Districts; National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research, La Trobe University, 1999).

Hydra were convicted of piracy and transported to Australia as punishment.⁵ Their ship docked at Sydney Cove in August 1829. If we fast forward, one of those seven, Gikas Voulgaris, eventually married, moved to Cooma and the Voulgaris family settled in the Canberra region.⁶

I also note the contribution of Kytherian migrants to the life of Canberra. Settlers from Kythera opened the first cafes in Canberra.⁷ They were the pioneers of our vibrant Canberra cafe culture.

As Hellenic lawyers, you all make a valuable contribution to what is a diverse and progressive Australian legal culture.

Your journeys remind us that, in Australia today, it is possible to succeed professionally while retaining another cultural heritage. We must keep it that way.

Let's never forget the talent and cultural wealth that migrants bring to this country. We all benefit from ensuring that migrants have equality of opportunity (particularly equality of educational opportunity) and also retain their cultural heritage.

I congratulate those responsible for this Association.

The Association brings together lawyers with similar cultural backgrounds, talents and interests. Its members will enjoy sharing their Hellenic culture, and their professional experiences. And it will be a vehicle through which its members can continue to contribute to their Hellenic communities, to the legal profession and to the broader Australian community.

⁵ Ibid 14.

⁶ Ibid 39, 83.

⁷ Ibid 54.