
Ceremonial Sitting of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia to welcome the Honourable Justice William Alstergren as Chief Judge of the Federal Circuit Court (Wednesday 29 November 2017)

I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

This is your Honour's second welcome, and as Daffy Duck once observed, it will be almost but not quite more than you deserve.

It is appropriate that it take place here on your home ground and I will be followed by two eminent practitioners from Victoria - Wendy Morris representing the Melbourne Bar and Fiona McLeod on behalf of the Law Council of Australia. I shall leave to them your practice at the bar.

You have been appointed to lead a national court with a broad and demanding jurisdiction and the qualities of leadership that will call upon have been remarked upon by another eminent member of the bar and former member of the High Court Susan Crennan who had said of your Honour:

- You tackle problems with a high level of pragmatism and diplomacy;
- You have a firm grasp of contemporaneous issues concerning access to justice and the judiciary;
- You have shown leadership qualities, enthusiasm and capacity for hard work;
- And you get things done which is important in a leader of a court.

Now that is a reference and High Court judges, sitting or retired, aren't known for hyperbole.

Your Honour has been engaged with the ABA since 2008. In that year you were invited to coach an Advanced Trial Advocacy Course. You assisted in that valuable work regularly thereafter.

What would one have been described as boyish enthusiasm was a hallmark of your Honour's approach to the task. That verve in approaching each and every undertaking has been an asset from which the ABA and thus the Bar nationally benefited.

You acted as a Council member of the ABA from 2013 and a Director from its incorporation in 2015 and have held the position of Treasurer, Vice President and President.

To each role you applied yourself with zeal.

The functions of the ABA include advocacy training, conference organising and advancing issues relating to both the profession nationally and the rule of law.

Its role has expanded over recent years, notably in organising together with a particular state bar a national conference.

The first national conference was successfully held last year in Melbourne in conjunction with the Victorian Bar Association.

In its conception, organisation and management you took a leading part. It was a long overdue innovation. That formidable start is to be followed next year in Sydney.

More recently you were at the helm of the 2017 Conference in London and Dublin.

The policy role of the ABA can be challenging. It is a body made up of all the independent bars of all the States and Territories and properly focuses on national issues. You led it as President in procuring a national approach to access to justice and augmentation of legal aid, indigenous incarceration and more recently in responding to one of the more bizarre attacks on the legal profession in modern times: that of providing their services free of charge to asylum seekers. Apparently, it would have been fine if done for a fee.

In the challenges facing the profession you were a tireless advocate of early briefing of the bar and in the focused and efficient supply of legal services.

Your service to the Australian bar is appreciated. Your future service to the court will be appreciated.

Congratulations and good luck.

May it please the court.