

CEREMONIAL SITTING OF THE FULL COURT

TO WELCOME THE HONOURABLE THE HON. JUSTICE JANE NEEDHAM

Speech by Michael Izzo SC, Vice-President of the Australian Bar Association

May it please the court. I, too, recognise the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal of the Eora Nation, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I extend those respects to any First Nations people here today.

It is a privilege to welcome your Honour Justice Needham on behalf of the Australian Bar Association. The President of the ABA, Peter Dunning KC, regrets that he cannot be here, and asks that I convey his apologies.

Mr Toomey will give the principal address on behalf of the Bar. I will not steal his thunder, and will keep my comments very brief. But one thing I do wish to do is to take this opportunity to acknowledge, publicly, the deep impact that your Honour has left on the Bar – not just in New South Wales, but at a national level. Your Honour's career at the Bar, both as a barrister and as a much-loved President, and later Advocate for Change for the New South Wales Bar Association, has been marked by a passion for fostering a diverse and inclusive community, where the wellbeing of barristers is paramount.

Your Honour was instrumental in the implementation of gender equitable briefing policies at the national level. Your Honour introduced best practice guidelines on bullying and harassment, which are now mirrored in guidelines adopted by the ABA and other jurisdictions. And, with Chief Justice Bathurst, your Honour established a protocol governing predictability of sitting hours, which is a worthy model for every jurisdiction in this country. This, at a time when the local Bar was engulfed in passionate debate over the then hot topics of incorporation, and the reintroduction of Queen's Counsel. Your Honour had the tenacity and presence of mind to look past those now long-forgotten struggles and focus on measures which would make a tangible and lasting impact on barristers, and lawyers more broadly, and through them, the administration of justice.

At a personal level, your Honour has been a generous mentor and confidante, legendary for your breakfast sessions and your Honour's quiet diplomacy. Your Honour's calm and welcoming presence has been a source of comfort and support for so many at the Bar.

The Bar's loss is the Federal Court's gain. Your Honour comes to the role with a depth of experience in life and the law, but also, with an innate sense of justice, decency and compassion. Your Honour's legal knowledge and experience spans many areas across equity, commercial and administrative law. It will be a privilege to see your Honour thrive as a judge of this court, just as it has been to know your Honour as a barrister. On behalf of the Australian Bars, congratulations and the warmest wishes. May it please the court.

12 July 2024