

SPEECH BY PETER DUNNING KC AT THE CEREMONIAL SITTING OF THE FULL COURT OF THE FEDERAL CIRCUIT AND FAMILY COURT OF AUSTRALIA (DIVISION 1) TO WELCOME THE HONOURABLE JUDGE GOODCHILD AND THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE CURRAN

May it please the Court. Chief Justice, Deputy Chief Justice, Justices of the Federal Circuit and Family Court, the Attorney-General for the Commonwealth, Ms Simpson, Ms Ball, and can I particularly notice those members of the ACT Judiciary with us today — Chief Justice Baker, Chief Coroner Archer, Special Magistrate Hopkins and Chief Magistrate Walker, who come today to share this very special day.

Justice Curran, it is my privilege and pleasure in equal measure to get to speak today on behalf of not just the ACT Bar, but barristers Australia-wide on a day when we are justifiably proud that one of our numbers has been asked to join this Court, and we know will do such an exceptional job.

Your Honour's act in taking the appointment is one of great public service that ought be publicly recognised. This Court is a Court that touches the lives of many Australians. Indeed, for many of the litigants in this Court, their only experience in litigation will be in it, and it is apt to make a lasting impression in circumstances of necessary angst and difficulty. It calls for special skills, not just as a lawyer but as a human, to fulfil that task, and your Honour has them in spades.

Your Honour was appointed a solicitor in 1993, as we have heard, and I will leave that to Ms Simpson and Ms Ball to discuss, but in 2012, your Honour had the prescience to join the Bar. You have practised in the Act and in Queensland and, indeed, been a Registrar of this Court and the Federal Magistrates Court. But it is your time at the Bar that I would particularly wish to emphasise today.

Your Honour became a giant of the ACT Bar, and you became that because of your skill, your acumen, your decency and your compassion towards others. Your Honour became President of the Australian Capital Territory Bar Association, which was where I first had the good fortune to meet your Honour, and indeed, you were its first female President, as we have already heard.

Like the Chief Justice, your Honour has served the Australian Bar Association with distinction as well. It would be remiss of me not to note the calm head and decency your Honour brought to your presidency during a time of particular difficulty in the Australian Capital Territory, and you did barristers Australia-wide proud in doing so.

Your Honour is described, and rightly so, as in every sense a leader of women lawyers in the Australian Capital Territory and more generally. Your Honour has been a great mentor to young women coming through the Bar, something that remains a challenge that we seek ever to improve. Beyond that, your Honour has been just a wonderful mentor to young barristers coming through.

Your Honour is described as the go-to mediator — or, at least, was described as the go-to mediator in the Australian Capital Territory, and all of those qualities I spoke of at the outset were the reason your Honour was such a skilled mediator. Your Honour developed, rightly, a national recognition as a mediator in the historical sex abuse mediation sphere. It is a particularly difficult and fraught one, and your Honour's empathy, which was authentic and reassuring, I am told was nothing short of exceptional in that special area of practice.

As the President of the ACT Bar, you were described to me as having infectious enthusiasm, Chief Justice, something that will no doubt transition to this Court to great advantage. What is this court's and the country's great gain has, of course, been the great loss to the Australian Capital Territory Bar.

If, Chief Justice, pride remains a sin, I am reliably informed there has been a lot of sinning in the national capital. Your colleagues are justifiably proud, Justice Curran, of your appointment today.

Nobody comes to an appointment today without the love and the support of their family. The Bar is a challenging occupation; it is time consuming; it is demanding on many levels. Your Honour is lucky to have been blessed with a beautiful family, who are here today and are justifiably proud of your Honour's well-earned achievement. Days like today are inevitably bittersweet, and particularly today. For your children, Kefi, Kebs, Seni and Loko, today is a day of understandable pride, as it is for your mother, Janet. It's a bitter day in the sense that your late husband is not here today, but everybody I have spoken to has said that today would have been one of enormous pride to him, and rightly so.

Justice Curran, on behalf of the barristers of Australia, may we offer our heartfelt congratulations on this very fine appointment, and wish you many happy years as a Justice of this Court. May it please the Court.

24 March 2023