



Law Council
OF AUSTRALIA

Welcome to Judge Jane Costigan

Speech delivered by Fiona McLeod SC, President of the Law Council of Australia at the Federal Circuit Court, Newcastle.

8 November 2017

May it please the Court.

I too acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we appear, and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

It is my great honour today to speak on behalf of the Law Council of Australia and welcome Your Honour's appointment as a judge of this Court.

We have heard from Mr Perry and Mr Graham Your Honour's journey to this place and your significant contribution to the law and the community.

You have expertise and experience in family law and commercial law.

You have proven an inspiring leader for your colleagues at Legal Aid NSW.

You have been dedicated to your clients and served them well.

In short, your qualifications and personal qualities make for a very fine appointment.

The Federal Circuit Court is perhaps the busiest court in the country.

Last year it handled more than 95,000 filings. This Registry has been under particular pressure for some time. Many of our most vulnerable members of the community walk through these doors looking for justice at a time of enormous stress facing. It is a challenging jurisdiction.

Your Honour brings to the role a depth of experience in family law matters and the legal assistance sector that will prove invaluable.

Many of Your Honour's colleagues from the Gosford legal aid office are here today. I am told they already miss Your Honour terribly, but are a little apprehensive about appearing before you.

You were a fantastic supervisor, very knowledgeable – especially on family law – and very approachable. You were also someone who set high standards. Perhaps this is the cause of the apprehension, and counsel should be on notice.

But you also understand the pressures of legal work and would offer quiet support to anyone who was struggling.

The Central Coast is beautiful, but it has its share of vulnerable people who suffer socio-economic disadvantage.

Your Honour had a reputation as someone who genuinely cared that these people did not feel at a disadvantage when they engaged with legal aid – or the justice system.

You have been known to visit clients at home to ensure that document was signed on time or an affidavit was taken.

The regard with which you are held by the Family Court was evident in your work as an Independent Children's Lawyer. This meant you acted on behalf of children – and other concerned parties – in complex matters where the court needed guidance. You well understand the creed of the Family Law Act – that the welfare of the child is paramount.

You have also been a valued speaker at legal conferences and helped organise one on child representation that will be held in Terrigal later this month.

As news of your appointment spread, Your Honour was bumped up the speakers list and will facilitate a session on the Family Court's inherent wardship jurisdiction for radicalised youth.

In the office you have also provided vital help in another area – to its netball team.

As we've heard Your Honour has been a gun player – a goal shooter – since your school days at Henry Kendall High, where you were dux, not far from the legal aid office.

It appears you also had, and still have – in common with New South Wales Law Society President, Pauline Wright – a very good singing voice, which meant prominent roles in productions such as the *'King And I'* and *'Calamity Jane'*.

It will come as some assurance that Your Honour was not cast as Jane, although I can see Your Honour restoring order to this Court with your trusty pistols.

It was at school that you first met your husband Rod, He was in the year ahead and you were part of the same social group.

You then ended up at Sydney University together, but it was not until you returned from a decade working in London that you became a team.

Your son Matthew arrived in 2000. You obviously passed on the sporting gene because he has become a very good water polo player of note – and dragged you across the state – and the country – in the process.

Matthew can still remember some French that he picked up when the family spent a year in France about ten years ago. You speak French yourself, another talent Your Honour shares with Ms Wright, which made it easy to enjoy all the countryside offers.

Your friends always expected there would be another "Year in Provence", but I suspect that will now have to wait a few more years. I shall foreshadow an application to Chief Judge now.

Aside from that year away, you and Rod have been happy to stay on the Central Coast.

For the past nine years you have been a director of the award-winning Central Coast radio station – Today's Country94One – and your work as a board member of Central Coast Living Options, which is focussed on caring for the disabled.

These roles emphasise the esteem in which you are held, and the value you place on being connected to your local community.

The Law Council looks forward to the many goals you will be shooting, the contribution you will make to this fine Court and we wish you and your family well for the years ahead.

May it please the Court.

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