



Law Council
OF AUSTRALIA

Ceremonial Sitting of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia – Judge Jonathan Forbes and Judge Catherine Symons

Speech delivered via online by Dr Jacoba Brasch QC, President of the Law Council of Australia, at the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, Melbourne.

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May it please the Court.

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country on which we all meet, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

It is an honour to be with you all today. The marvels of technology means we can come together from the west, to the east and all in between, over various time zones to join in this ceremony.

I acknowledge Madam Attorney-General, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, the Chief Justice, The Hon. Justice William Alstergren; all judicial officers; dignitaries; and colleagues; and most of all Your Honours Judge Forbes and Judge Symonds, and Your Honours' families, friends and colleagues. I have absolutely no doubt they will all be bursting with immense pride.

On behalf of all the lawyers of Australia, congratulations to you both.

While we formally welcome you today, Your Honours commenced in the Victorian registry in July and have been making a significant contribution to the administration of justice for several months already.

I spoke on Friday at the ceremonial sitting to welcome her Honour Judge Allyson Ladhams to the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia in Perth.

During that presentation, I highlighted how important it is for our profession to appreciate and promote the breadth of talent and skills we have amongst us and how this depth of capability makes a real difference in the lives of Australians each and every day.

Your Honours are the living, breathing example of the diversity of experience within the legal profession and the multitude of ways in which we can and do serve our community.

Judge Forbes, you studied both business and law at university and obtained an MBA. You bring to this role a tremendous amount of experience in all matters concerned with workplace, industrial and discrimination law – as well as a keen interest in sports law.

People who have worked with you and know you well speak highly of your dedication, commitment to hard work, and empathy; as well as the trust and confidence you engendered in the people who have come to you for assistance over the course of your career.

I understand you are a very keen road cyclist and have been for many years. Riding amongst traffic takes a level of fearlessness and resolve at the best of times, but day in day out on the streets of Melbourne (when they are busy) – that is a whole other level steely determination.

I am sure this pastime is one of the reasons that professionally you are unflappable and composed under pressure.

As one of your colleagues said to me, your first-rate legal skills and personal qualities make you well-equipped to deal with the range of jurisdiction covered by

the Court to the benefit of parties and practitioners. Your willingness to listen, your compassion and understanding will serve all those who come before you and makes your appointment to the bench one which should be celebrated.

When reflecting on your distinguished career, Judge Symons, the list of all you have achieved already is extraordinarily long.

It includes expertise in employment, discrimination and administrative law; appearances before nearly every Court and Tribunal, not to mention the Fair Work Commission; and numerous awards and recognition along the way.

You have also generously given back to our profession through mentoring and training others. Your Honour has helped strengthen and supported the administration of justice and the legal system by sharing your knowledge and experience to enhance the education and professional development of entry-level lawyers through to senior legal practitioners.

Over the past 18 months the way we have practised and our Courts have operated has changed significantly in response to the challenges presented by COVID. Moving online has played a role not just in keeping the wheels of justice turning, but in many instances has even increased access to justice.

I understand utilising technology to improve service and outcomes is something you embrace and see value in, so I am sure you will help us continue to innovate for the good of the people we serve.

I have been told that Your Honour had a moment when you wanted to be a journalist or a diplomat and you might have been lost to the law. While we are pleased we won you over to our team, these early career aspirations say so much

about why you are such an outstanding contributor to the justice system – both these jobs require a commitment to finding the truth, an ability to see all sides of an argument, to negotiate for the best results, and to speak for those who need and deserve representation.

Your Honours, your accomplishments are many and varied.

You have each shown yourselves to be committed advocates, and the people of Australia will be privileged to be served by you both in these new roles.

May it please the court.

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