

## **“If you have plenty, you must share”**

### **Admissions Ceremony Friday, 19 June 2020 Supreme Court of the ACT**

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and I pay my respects to their elders, past and present. I acknowledge that sovereignty over this land was never ceded. I also acknowledge that in the past 29 years, in Australia, 437 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have died in custody.<sup>1</sup>

Ordinarily, for an admissions ceremony, we would have a full court of at least three judges presiding over a much larger group of admissions. It would be a grander, but also a much more impersonal occasion. Because of the pandemic, we have arranged for smaller groups of people to be admitted simultaneously throughout the day, generally by just one judge. However, for this admissions ceremony, I am pleased to be joined by Ashford AJ who has had a long association with the Court.

Please excuse me if I take this opportunity to mention two people who have been admitted in this ceremony.

First, my Senior Associate, Sienna Lake. I know that she will be an exemplary practitioner, and I hope to see her on the practitioner side of the Bar table in the not too distant future, perhaps opposed by one of the other admittees.

Second, Vanessa Graf, who is a Butchulla descendant. The Butchulla people are the traditional owners of K'gari or Fraser Island. Ms Graf is wearing her grandmother's headdress. The ochre dots worn by Ms Graf represent the three Butchulla laws: what is good for the land comes first; do not take or touch anything that does not belong to you; if you have plenty, you must share.

To all new practitioners, congratulations and welcome to the profession. I am sure that it has been a long journey for you. Congratulations too, to the family and friends who have supported you along the way. At times, they probably thought that they would never see this day.

We live in strange times—and I am not referring to the fact that you have been admitted to the legal profession! This year in Canberra, we have experienced catastrophic bush fires, hail the size of golf balls, a pandemic, and there have been worldwide protests against racism—and it is only June.

However, today is not a time to dwell on troubles. Today is an opportunity for you and your supporters to celebrate a happy occasion in what has been a bleak year to date, perhaps with your first sit down restaurant meal in a long time.

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<sup>1</sup> Lorena Allem, et al, 'Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Black Lives Matter Protests Referred To Our Count of 432 Deaths. It's Now 437.' (online, 9 June 2020) <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/09/black-lives-matter-protesters-referred-to-our-count-of-432-aboriginal-deaths-in-custody-its-now-437>>.

It is also an occasion for reflection. Your admission today is an important milestone in your lives, certainly in your professional lives and probably in your personal lives as well.

Your legal training enables you to assess the evidence, to apply the law to the evidence and to reason to a solution. We live in a world of information and misinformation overload. Daily, we are bombarded with fake news and inflammatory tweets. Your education has provided you with the skills to think critically about the information presented to you, to see through the political doublespeak and to apply evidence-based reasoning. If only politicians throughout the globe were so gifted!

Today, you have been admitted to the profession which, in my completely unbiased opinion, is the most satisfying of the professions. With the privilege of admission to the legal profession comes responsibility and reward.

As a member of the legal profession, a core responsibility is to act honestly. If you work in the courts, it is likely that, if you stray from honesty, this will be detected quickly. However, if your work is less closely connected with the courts, it will be easier to lose sight of the central importance of scrupulous honesty, particularly if you work in commercial practice. You may deal with clients who live their lives at the margins of honesty or even beyond. Do not be influenced by their ethics. If you remain steadfast in your honesty, you will build a lifelong reputation as a practitioner of integrity. Reputation is hard to build and is easily lost. Once lost, it is rare for a good reputation to be fully recovered. In addition to building your own reputation, by acting honestly, you will maintain the community's confidence in the legal profession generally and in the rule of law.

So much for responsibility—what about reward? I am not going to speak of financial reward. In the legal profession these days, one cannot guarantee that. I am going to speak of something that is more important.

As a member of the legal profession, you have a privileged position in our community. You have a voice that carries authority. It is not a voice to speak for yourselves, it is a voice to speak for others, to advise others about their rights, and then to advocate on their behalf in the courts and elsewhere. Through your voice, you can empower others. That is your reward: the opportunity to empower others.

This afternoon we have learned of the Butchulla law, that if you have plenty, you must share. You do have plenty. You have knowledge, skills and voice. I hope that you will share this wealth with those in need. If you do so, it is you who will be rewarded.

May the road rise up to meet you wherever your journey leads.