

SUPREME COURT OF THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DRUG AND ALCOHOL SENTENCING LIST

SPEECH OF ACTING JUSTICE STEWART ON THE OCCASION OF THE
GRADUATION OF ZACH MEADOW (A PSEUDONYM)

SCC 257, 258 of 2024

14 August 2026

Zach Meadow (a pseudonym), today, Friday the 14th of August 2026, is a fantastic day in your life. Today we are celebrating your graduation from this list. I understand that you have previously enjoyed being present for other participants graduations. Well, today you are the star of the show.

In fact, today is so special that you have three judges here to show just how proud you should be of yourself, your journey to graduation and what you have learned about you along the way.

Today we sit on the lands of others. The Traditional Custodians of this region enjoy a rich culture that extends back many tens of thousands of years.

This country extends south beyond Canberra to the land of the Ngarigo people, north up past Goulburn to the lands of the Dharug, west to the vast lands of the Wiradjuri and east out past Braidwood to the edge of where the lands of the Yuin people descend down to the cool and clear waters of the coast.

We live under the great sky and amongst the mountains, valleys and rivers of the Traditional Custodians. Their land gives us food, water, shelter and places to live, work and play amongst the grass, water and sometimes, snow. They have never ceded sovereignty of this place.

I pay my respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging. I acknowledge my great fortune at being able to celebrate the culture and influence of our First Nations people.

I welcome all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are present today.

Today is the first day that you and I have met in this list. Before today I have read through many documents that have painted a picture of you and your progress. Their Honours Justice McWilliam and Acting Justice Christensen have been with you for your journey. You are fortunate to have received their Honours' guidance, input and genuine care.

The treatment team has been here through the hard days and the easier days. They work hard to see results such as today. I thank them for their dedication and care (and perhaps persistence!) and, especially, for working through those tough days, even where words and tempers might have been shorter than was intended.

Zach, you have faced many challenges since your Drug and Alcohol Treatment Order was imposed on 05 May last year. You had spent 136 days in custody by then and the Court hopes that some positive life experience was taken away from that time by you. I recognise that custody is terribly unpleasant for you, so it has been great to see that you spent very limited time away from the community since being in this list.

I have read of your progress and appreciated that it has not always been an easy path for you. You are an educated man and one thing that strikes me about your participation in this list is your capacity for open-ness and true insight into what is affecting you and driving your feelings and behaviour. This seems to be one of your strengths as your feelings and behaviour are inextricably intertwined.

Many of your past struggles have arisen from how others have treated you and, consequently, your spiral into substance abuse. You became part of this list because of the behaviour you displayed to others whilst you were not sober.

So, your rehabilitation journey has been crucial to you being able to maintain healthy relationships with those that you care about the most. This is a journey that all of us share. How we treat others and behave around them is fundamental to the positivity, strength and security of our relationships.

You have worked hard to change your behaviour in social settings. You have learned that something so simple and socially acceptable as having a drink of alcohol has the potential to disrupt your goals.

You have fallen off your path at times. But what I have seen is that you have always got up, dusted yourself off and taken those seemingly enormous steps to continue. I have read that when you have lapsed you have felt and expressed deep disappointment in yourself. These feelings will help you stay on track in the future.

All the way through this you have displayed a drive to work that is commendable. So many of the notations on your file relate to your endeavours to seek out work and to do that work. The fact that you have maintained such a strong work ethic whilst you have been on your journey through this list speaks volumes to your drive and the great potential you have as a person.

All through this your love and support for your partner has remained. You have both endured personal loss. I am sure that your partner shares the pride that you have in your self today.

Your journey doesn't end here.

Whilst reading through all of these documents I have hoped that this day brings you great joy. What I also hope for you is that you remember all of the strong emotions that you have experienced along the way. What we want for you is that the memory of those intense feelings stays with you and helps you maintain your resolve to be independent of the substances that have had such a destructive effect on your life and the lives of those you cherish.

Your sentence continues through to 25 August 2028. You are now entering the good

behaviour portion of that sentence. You will have the benefit of supervision for as long as that is required.

What I do want you to know is this. You have the experience and determination to succeed. You also have the collective good will of everyone in this room.

What judges also know is that the past does not always define people or their future.

You have demonstrated an amazing capacity for change.

All of us wish you the very best for the future. Congratulations. Go well.

Acting Justice Stewart
ACT Supreme Court