

**THE HON. JUSTICE DEREK PRICE AO
CHIEF JUDGE OF THE DISTRICT COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
FAREWELL CEREMONY FOR JUDGE STEPHEN NORRISH QC
UPON THE OCCASION OF HIS RETIREMENT AS A JUDGE OF THE
DISTRICT COURT**

23 APRIL 2021

- 1 I would like to begin by acknowledging the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners of the land on which this place the District Court of New South Wales now sits and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

- 2 I extend a very warm welcome to those of you attending this ceremony either in person or by virtual means.

- 3 This special sitting has been convened to farewell a much admired Judge, Judge Stephen Norrish QC.

- 4 Judge Norrish you have served the Court with distinction for over 20 years. When you were sworn in as a Judge on 3 October 2000, you were a leading practitioner at the criminal bar, having been appointed Queen's Counsel in 1987.

- 5 Although I intend to focus upon your contribution to the work of the Court, I will briefly mention that your distinguished career included working as a solicitor for the Aboriginal Legal Service, your appointment as a Public Defender in June 1980 and elevation to Deputy Senior Public Defender seven years later.

- 6 In 1988, you resigned from your position as Deputy Senior Public Defender to become Senior Counsel assisting the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, a role you performed until 1990.

- 7 I will leave it to those who follow to speak in more detail about your career and service to the community.

- 8 At your swearing in as a judge, you referred to the qualities you observed in Hal Wootten AC, QC, the Royal Commissioner as being a combination of “insight, intelligence” and “compassion” and you expressed the wish that some of the qualities that Commissioner Wootten displayed, you would bring to the Court.
- 9 Judge Norrish you have undoubtedly done so. Upon your appointment as a judge, you were immediately thrown into the criminal work of the Court. You have presided over many difficult trials and sentenced many offenders. You have presided in Sydney and on circuit. Your intelligence, thorough knowledge of the law, sense of fairness and compassion are well known to all of those who have appeared before you, as is your expectation that lawyers be prepared and be able to provide appropriate assistance to the Court.
- 10 The burdens of judicial office did not diminish your concern for the treatment of First Nations people in the criminal justice system. You have delivered speeches and written articles on this issue. Your reflections on the Royal Commission and suggested reforms are a featured article in this month’s Judicial Officers’ Bulletin. You have been the Court’s leader in developing and encouraging judicial participation in cultural awareness programs. You were a foundation member of the Judicial Commission, Joint Steering Committee with the ALJA Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Program and the Chairperson of the Judicial Commission Ngara Yura Committee for some years.
- 11 Your contribution to the Court cannot be properly understood without further mentioning the person that you are. Your warm, welcoming personality coupled with generous offers of assistance made you a judge who your colleagues would consult when issues both personal and judicial needed to be discussed. Your famous handshake proffered to any judge whom you encountered brightened up the day of many of us. How we all suffered last year when we were restricted to a Norrish wave or elbow exchange!
- 12 Permit me to return to your swearing in speech. You recounted that you had been given “the Book of Irish Laws”, a book that set out the laws of the Brehons, jurists who travelled around Ireland dispensing justice until the completion of

the English conquest in the early 17th century. A particular law that was drawn to your attention was one that stated:

“When a judge deviates from the truth a blotch will appear on his cheek.”

- 13 I am able to confidently state your expression of hope that your career on the bench would be spent without any facial blemishes emanating from breaches of ancient Gaelic law has been fulfilled, your beard notwithstanding.
- 14 Most importantly, you leave this Court being held in the highest esteem by your colleagues and by the members of the legal profession. During your judicial career, you have demonstrated the best qualities expected of a judge.
- 15 This is a nostalgic occasion for the Court. When you were sworn in as a judge, there were 21 judges of the Court who had been conferred by the Crown with the Office of Queen’s Counsel. You are the last District Court judge who is entitled to the post-nominal “Q.C.” I am afraid to say that you are the end of an era.
- 16 Thank you for your service to the Court. On behalf of your colleagues I wish you and Joanne a very happy and healthy future. We will miss you.