

Dinny Barritt retires

Ill-health has forced His Worship Denis Barritt SM to retire after 14 years in the Northern Territory. A ceremonial sitting was held in Alice Springs on 29 January.

Representing the Attorney-General, Shane Stone MLA said Mr Barritt was a man of enormous judicial common sense and fairness, though not without a touch of the unusual.

"I recall one particular case where both husband and wife appeared before Your Worship and you called upon the husband to give his account of events. You then turned to the wife and invited her to do the same.

"After listening to the tirade of the wife, which was directed at not only her husband but everyone in the court and Your Worship, you threw down your pen and you commented: 'No wonder he

clocked you; I would have done it myself.'," Mr Stone said.

He also spoke of Mr Barritt's unusual bond conditions in relation to traffic offences where offenders were sentenced to drink only light beer for the duration of their bond.

On the subject of 'crash and bash' cases, Mr Stone said Mr Barritt had a great deal of experience in such cases from his days at the Victorian Bar.

"I'm still at a loss to understand how the intersection of Bourke and Lonsdale Streets bears any resemblance or similarity to that of Todd and Leichhardt," he said.

"Your Worship, the Magistracy in the Northern Territory will be the poorer for your departure.

"You, Sir, have made a significant and valuable contribution to the justice system in the Northern Territory.

"Yes, you have been controversial, provocative, thoughtful, but above all else you've conducted yourself and your office with the utmost propriety and in the interest of all Territorians who came before you, always with

their interest foremost in mind.

"I would urge upon Your Worship not to record a conviction, that you be released on your own recognizance, and that you drink only Carlton Light between sunset and dawn on your retirement."

Roger Bennett represented the President of the Law Society and said: "It didn't take long for Your Worship to become a well-known figure in Central Australia, and subsequently throughout Australia, when you took the unprecedented step of allowing television cameras into this courtroom to televise your findings for the first Azaria Chamberlain inquest.

"Your Worship has generally been happy to give the media some worthwhile comments to make a good media story from your court, and I believe

"You were heard to say to one practitioner that if he wanted common sense and justice he should continue with the case before you, but if he sought the law then he should immediately catch a plane to Darwin."

that this has made many important issues more public.

"Your Worship has enjoyed a long and distinguished time on the bench in Central Australia.

"You have been extremely hard working. You have been honest, fair, fearless, controversial and a character.

"On behalf of the Law Society, and in particular the legal practitioners of Central Australia, I wish Your Worship a happy retirement and sincerely hope that your health allows you same."

Presiding at the sitting was the Chief Stipendiary Magistrate, Sally Thomas, who said the extraordinary thing about Mr Barritt was the way in which he combined his love and knowledge of the law with his love and knowledge of people.

"I have been very honoured to be on the bench with Mr Barritt," Ms Thomas said.

"He has my great admiration for his

contribution to the judiciary.

"Equally, I acknowledge his wife, Sheila Barritt, for her support and her own contribution to life in Alice Springs.

"On behalf of all the Magistrates of the Northern Territory, I express our appreciation and gratitude to the example that Mr Barritt has been to all of us," she said.

Addressing in reply, Mr Barritt said in 1948 he spoke his first words in a court of law as a nervous young constable of police.

"I am far more nervous today than I was on that occasion, and I made a shocking mess of what I was supposed to say then," he said.

Referring to the Chief Stipendiary Magistrate, Mr Barritt said: "I found it a unique experience to be subject to

petticoat government, both at home and work.

"However, the experience has only

shown me the value that women properly selected on merit can make to our society."

Mr Barritt thanked a variety of people and organisations including colleagues, court staff, medical staff, practitioners, police, government departments and his wife.

He said one of the most outstanding initiatives of the NT government was the introduction of police aides and he urged the scheme be continued.

He said the two most prominent social ills in our community are alcohol and petrol sniffing.

"Why is it lawful for a person to be able to sniff such a dangerous product?

"To my mind this problem cries out for urgent legislative action.

"In the past too much attention has been given to the erudite utterances of do-gooders," he said.

Mr Barritt said that although he was leaving the Territory he would leave his heart behind.