

Chief Magistrate Hugh Bradley

When Hugh Bradley first arrived in Darwin in 1967 on a motorbike (a 1959 BMW, which he still owns and rides), it would be fair to say that the job of Chief Magistrate was not one that he aspired to.

It would probably be equally fair to suggest that when he announced his retirement as managing partner at Ward Keller in 1997, he envisaged a wealth of time spent taking long and interesting holidays and attending to the obligatory tasks of retirement -catching up on reading, playing more tennis and generally taking time to smell the flowers.

However, there would be very few practitioners in the Territory who will regret the fact that the intellect, acuity and legal expertise of the man will remain at the service of the legal system in the NT, and importantly, at the service of the NT community, for some time to come.

Hugh Bradley will take up the position of Chief Stipendary Magistrate in March, at a time when the structure of the legal profession and the role of the courts are relatively important matters of interest to the thinking public. Given the elevation of the jurisdiction of the Magistrates' Courts in the NT and the diversity of matters that are decided there, the role of Chief Magistrate will indeed be an "interesting challenge".

Close to thirty years of experience in the legal profession of the Territory and a long and controlling interest in one of its major firms have undoubtedly left the new Chief Magistrate well equipped to handle this challenge, although with customary personal humility, he has put out a general plea to the profession to "go gently with him" as he moves into this role. Those who have shaken in their shoes when learning that Hugh Bradley was to be on the other side of a matter may not feel inclined to heed this plea, but may be pacified to learn that one of the first tasks he will undertake as Chief Magistrate will be to consult widely with the profession and other stakeholders in the legal process. It is his stated aim as Chief Magistrate to increase community understanding of the role and function of the courts in the

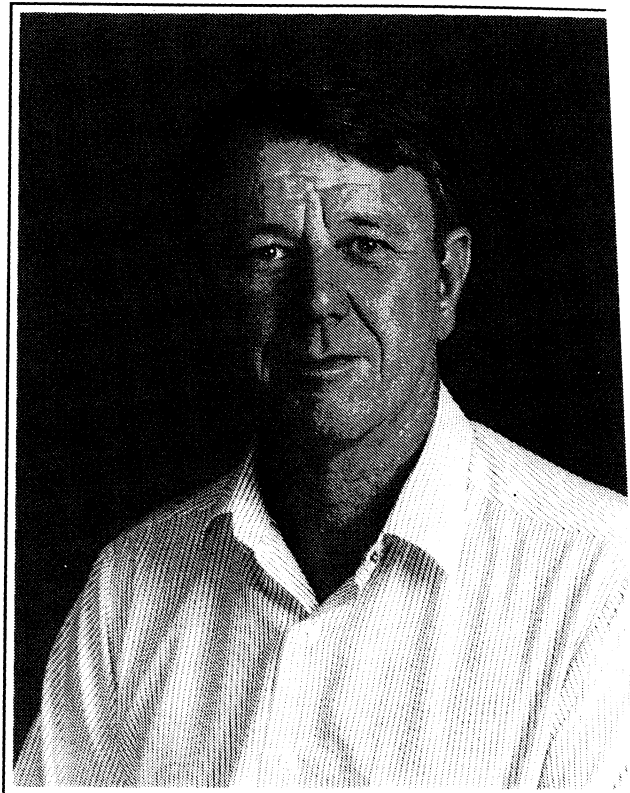
interest of providing better access to justice. The potential success of this aim is strengthened by the fact that the Attorney-General, at Hugh's request, has undertaken to provide the new Chief Magistrate with an open door with regard to the need for reform. Hugh Bradley does not view himself as person committed to any particular colour of politics and as such feels that he will be able to bring impartiality to this role.

The new Chief Magistrate notes many changes to the Territory's profession in his time, including the obvious one of its growth.

When he began practising in Darwin, all the lawyers knew each other and socialised regularly at the Carlton Bar of the Vic Hotel. The tales emerging from these encounters are now an integral part of the cultural history of the legal profession in Darwin and are undoubtedly best told by those who were present.

Members of today's far larger legal community are better able to blend and disappear into its mass and whilst this, at times, may work in their favour in social situations, he questions whether it may have created an unacceptable drop in standards and discipline in the more important practice of the law. Noting also the burgeoning complexity of the law over his 28 years of practice, Hugh Bradley admits to wondering whether justice is now any better served.

However, he shows a pride in the quality of graduates emerging from the NTU's Faculty of Law, as evidenced by



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his former firm's consistent employment of a number of these as articulated clerks. As a senior member of the profession, Hugh has contributed to the maintenance of that standard through his involvement in providing teaching expertise at the NTU.

The NT community can look forward to a Chief Magistrate who, although a self-confessed traditionalist in his views on matters such as the use of wigs and gowns, is a seeker of truth and above all, a man who will bring a wealth of experience and intelligence to the task before him.

The Law Society is proud to congratulate Hugh Bradley on his appointment, and in doing so notes that he is the first of its former Presidents to achieve this distinction. High profile appointments such as this sometimes provoke a measure of (albeit informal) negative comment from members of the profession, but in this case, it is a testament to the new Chief Magistrate that his appointment has been well-received by all quarters.