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Obituary

Ron Castan QC

Ian Gray, former Territory Chief Magistrate and barrister with John Toohey Chambers, reflects on the life of Ron Castan QC.

Ron Castan QC who died in Melbourne on 21 October was a national and international legal figure. He was a quietly effective champion of human rights on the world stage with a high profile and a much loved and respected champion of indigenous rights on the Australian stage. He was an outstanding advocate – advising or appearing in no less than 60 High Court cases. As others have said, his death was a national loss.

*“Like most great men
Ron was modest. But as
an advocate he was
powerful and fearless.”*

It is well known that Ron was Counsel for Eddie Mabo, John Koowarta and the Wik people and that he played a vital advisory role in the drafting of the Native Title Act 1993. However, it is probably less well known that he was a key adviser to the Northern, Central and Pitjantjatjara Land Councils almost from their inception.

His contribution was seminal and prodigious. Simply to recite the list of matters in which he was involved is to pay tribute to his enormous contribution to the development of land rights law and to the cause of indigenous Australians.

He appeared in the High Court in the Utopia case, the Meneling Station case, the Japanangka case, the Finnis River case, the cabinet note books (Ranger) case and the Lake Amadeus case.

He negotiated the Mereenie oil and gas Agreement, the Palm Valley gas agree-

ment, and the Granites Goldfields agreement. He advised on the Gove Na

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Title claim, the McArthur River negotiations, the NT Heritage legislation, st route land claims and on the Natic Parks legislation and Uluru National I handover. He recently argued the ap by the Yorta Yorta people in the Federal Court. The list goes on. And repeated on a national scale- for exam he was one of the founders of the Vi rian Aboriginal Legal Service.

Like most great men Ron was modest. as an advocate he was powerful fearless. His commitment to the pursu a formula for real reconciliation was j sionate and unstinting, as was his co mitment to the power of reason and j suasion. He was generous with his t and his wise counsel.

Lawyers specialising in native title w were delighted that Ron had agreee join the newly established John Too Chambers. Not long before Ron d there was a dinner in Darwin to lau the Chambers and Ron was toasted as senior – and most eminent member the group. We certainly did not expec be farewelling him so soon afterwa We will all miss him.