

New High Court Justice announced

In September, Justice Susan Crennan was announced as the latest appointment to the High Court of Australia.

"The Government sought to appoint someone who has demonstrated, through the quality of her jurisprudence and her leadership, that she has the confidence of the legal profession and the broader Australian community," said Federal Attorney-General Phillip Ruddock.

"The essential criterion for judicial appointment is merit. Merit means legal excellence, a capacity for industry and a temperament suited to the performance of the judicial function," he said.

Justice Crennan has a distinguished legal career spanning more than 25 years. Commencing at the New South Wales Bar in 1979 where she read with the Commonwealth Solicitor-General, Mr David Bennett QC.

Appointed as Queen's Counsel in 1989, she was the first female Chair of the Victorian Bar Council from 1993 to 1994 and the first woman President of the Australian Bar Association from 1994 to 1995.

Justice Crennan was appointed to the bench of the Federal Court of Australia in 2003. She has also worked as counsel assisting the Tri-continental Royal Commission, been a part-time hearing commissioner for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and served on the Victorian Attorney-General's Law Reform Council and the Victorian Legal Aid Commission.

"Justice Crennan's appointment to the High Court is richly deserved and caps a long and distinguished legal career," said Law Council President-elect, Tim Bugg QC.

Justice Crennan's appointment to the bench will commence on 1 November 2005, taking up the position vacated by the retirement of Justice Michael McHugh. ①

Celebrating 40 years in practise cont...

70s. This firm was a training ground for a number of lawyers including Terry Coulehan, Tom Pauling, and Peter Barr, to name just a few.

After Cyclone Tracy, Black became an equity partner in Cridland and Bauer. This firm amalgamated with Poveys to become Cridlands. Black was associated with George Cridland for 26 years until he established his own family law practice in 1994.

Over the last 40 years, Black has extended his skills to more than just the law. He was Darwin Lord Mayor between 1980 and 1984 and spent 31 years involved in local government. He was the National President of the Local Government Association in 1985.

He has had a very long involvement in the community and he assisted in the foundation of the Marriage Guidance Council, now called Relationships Australia for which he was granted life membership, Crisis Line and the Good Neighbour Council.

Black has maintained his involvement as counsel and solicitor, regularly appearing in the Family Court, the Federal Magistrates Court, and to a lesser extent the Supreme Court, the last mention court in de facto relationship matters.

He has specialised in family law since 1975 and he has been an accredited specialist in family law for last six years.

During his time in practice, Black has witnessed many changes in family law.

"I'm probably one of the few people presently in practice, who had some knowledge of the law before the introduction of the 1959 Matrimonial Causes Act."

Black remembers well practicing under that Act. Obtaining evidence of adultery was common practice.

Preparing affidavits for private inquiry agents was commonplace.

The preparation of discretion statements was a regular event. In those days, it if a petitioner had an extramarital relationship that was an obligation upon the person to disclose that relationship. That disclosure was put into a sealed envelope, and the presiding judge was invited to read the discretion statement, and then to pronounce the decree nisi not with standing the facts contained in the discretion statement. The discretion statement was then placed in the envelope that was resealed.

For a divorce to be granted on the grounds of mutual separation, the parties had to be apart for five years.

The abolition of fault in the 1975 Act and the counselling facilities of the Court were welcomed by "litigants". Prior to that, black recalls that family lawyer's were also expected to be counselors.

"I think the real secret of being a good lawyer, is firstly to be a good communicator with your client, and secondly not to fall into the trap of taking on too much work."

Black says that his greatest joy as a practitioner was to have the privilege to move the admission of his son Carl who is now a senior associate with Cridlands, his old firm, as a practitioner of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory.

To those practitioners who are about to embark upon a life within the law, or to his fellow practitioners who are already well established, his advice is "to follow your dream!" ①