

# Remembering Barbara Bradshaw



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President, Law Council of Australia



I came to know Barbara through my role on the Council of the Law Society, where Barbara was the CEO for a number of years.

Barbara oversaw the implementation of a significant structural change to the legal profession, when the Legal Profession Act came into law in the NT in late 2006. This marked a significant milestone in the profession in the NT. It marked the introduction of the right of interstate practice; it laid the ground for national rules of conduct and ethics.

It began the era of the Northern Territory seeing itself as part of a national profession.

Barbara was highly regarded as the CEO of the NT Society. She established linkages with other Law Societies around Australia and pursued issues of interest to the profession in the NT, such as PI Insurance costs; rules around



conflict of interest, particularly in the large Aboriginal legal aid organisations, where the application of strict conflict rules would have been unworkable, and would have denied access to justice for many aboriginal people.

Barbara's connections with the Attorney General's Department, her skills and abilities from a career in parliamentary drafting and legal policy work, made her a natural fit for the legal profession reforms which occupied much of the work of the Society in the first few years of her term. Old structures like the Fidelity Fund, Public Purpose Trust, Legal Practitioners Complaints Committee, and even the Law Society itself, were brought into a new integrated structure. New concepts such as Registered Foreign Lawyers, Multidisciplinary Partnerships and Cost Assessors were introduced for the first time. Through Barbara's efforts, the transition was surprisingly smooth.

In 2008, when I was President, I joined the Funds Management Committee. This committee was responsible for the management of about \$10 Million in funds that had accumulated from trust account interest collections since the very beginnings of the profession in the NT.

The Global Financial Crisis hit just at that time. Barbara saw it coming. Her knowledge of financial systems and investment policy and her willingness to stand up to the professional advisers saved the Fund Millions.

This was just one example of the sheer depth and scale of Barbara's knowledge and intellect.

At the Law Council of Australia, Barbara was amongst the most highly regarded of the CEO's of law societies and bar associations Australia wide. Barbara made

an enormous contribution to ongoing legal profession reform particularly through her participation on behalf of the NT in the National Legal Profession Reform project's Consultative Group.

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Barbara was committed to the idea that participation in a national profession would benefit the Territory. And she was right. It enabled Territory lawyers to practice freely interstate. It introduced more competition to the legal profession in the Territory. Large firms seeking a national practice came to town. I have no doubt that standards across the whole profession improved as a result of their presence. It gave the NT profession and its unique issues, national leverage.

Barbara in handing over the reins to current CEO Megan Lawton declared that the LSNT punches well above its weight, and much of this punch can be attributed to Barbara's enthusiastic presence.

Megan has asked that I acknowledge Barbara's continuing support and mentorship from the first meeting to the last. Megan valued her judgment and her insight and she will be sorely missed.

Not long after I re-joined the Council of the Law Society as Vice President, with Barbara as CEO, I received my first email from Barbara, inviting me to some event or meeting and suggesting some arrangements attaching to it.

She finished the message asking if that would "suit", but, I noticed that she had spelled the word s-u-i-t-e "suite", as in a lounge suite. Barbara was at that time still quite

an intimidating creature to me – her powerful intellect and her command of her subject matter was readily apparent and I was no match for it.

I quietly noted the spelling error and wondered whether to say

something. Of course, I didn't.

A couple of months later, a similar query about a meeting time or venue or some such came through, and there it was again: "Let me know if that suites"?

I though, surely she's doing that deliberately.

I was too scared to check.

And so it went on. I would regularly receive a message, I'd be asked what suites, and I would ponder whether to correct her. At one stage, I thought about answering in the same vein. "Yes Barbara, that would suite me perfectly". Of course, I never did.

And so I do not know to this day whether it was a mistake, a grammatical blind spot, or a deliberate play on words.

It really doesn't matter, because it so captured both her humanity, and her quirkiness, her humour and her mischievousness; always there if you were close enough to see it, but otherwise easily overlooked.

And now, whenever anyone asks me if something suits, I find myself silently correcting them the other way: You mean "suites". And I think my response, to myself: "That would suite me perfectly".

And every time I do, I'm reminded of Barbara, and it makes me smile. ●

