

Valedictory Ceremony
The Honourable Mr Justice W C Lee
9.15 am Friday 30 April 1999
Banco Court

Chief Justice's observations.

We gather on the eve of the retirement of our colleague, the Honourable Mr Justice William Charles Lee. We convene to acknowledge His Honour's outstanding contribution to the judicial government of this State, and to wish him and Mrs Iris Lee well as they leave our immediate midst.

Some Judges are not able to be present today. I know all would join me in the sentiments I am about to express. Justices Williams, Ambrose and Byrne are on leave and overseas. Justice Davies is likewise on leave. Justices Thomas, Demack, Cullinane and Jones, who also cannot be present today, have asked to be mentioned specifically. Former Chief Justice Sir Walter Campbell, who was Chief Justice when Mr Justice Lee was a Master, also cannot be here, and sends his good wishes.

I acknowledge the presence of the Honourable the Attorney General, Judges of District Court; the Chief Stipendiary Magistrate and magistrates; Justice Callinan of the High Court of Australia; Judges of the Federal Court; and retired Judges of this Court, the Honourable P D Connolly and the Hon K W Ryan. The Chief Judge has apologised for his inability to be here.

Mr Justice Lee commenced his judicial career on 6 November 1980 when he was appointed the first Master of the Supreme Court. He rose to the rank of Senior Master on 15 May 1986, and was appointed a Judge on 20 February 1989.

In his eight years as Master, His Honour wrought considerable procedural change by then substantially overdue. By the early 1980s, delay in the disposal of the civil and criminal work of the Court had become a major problem. Master Lee QC, as he then was, pioneered a callover system which has served the Court very well up to recent times. Interestingly, his criminal callover altered the decades-old culture which had reserved to the Crown the right to say which trial would commence and before which Judge. As Master, his output of useful judgments on matters of practice and procedure in particular, was monumental, and very substantially helpful to the profession and the litigating public - and I should add - his judicial colleagues.

The then Master Lee inevitably developed a close relationship with the profession, and was ever courteous and helpful. It was never his approach to score points, but

rather to help the practitioner actively to a better presentation of the client's business. The Master did not mind, however, if others occasionally scored points off him. Hence Crowley QC's humorous attribution to His Honour of statements which have since become time hallowed: "... but you haven't read my most recent unreported decision ..." and "haven't you seen the Practice Direction I am to issue tomorrow?"

As Master especially, our colleague established a close relationship also with the staff of the Registry: the Registrar has asked that I specially mention the respectful admiration which grew out of that relationship - I am sure on both sides, and I particularly note the presence of the Registrar, Deputy Registrars and other Registry officers.

As a Judge, now for more than 10 years, His Honour has discharged his duty with utter dedication, enormous enthusiasm, admirable thoroughness, and exemplary judicial quality. He has been a prolific judgment writer: some 200 of his judgments are reported. Few were ever successfully challenged on appeal. In addition to that particular judicial commitment, His Honour was Chairman of the Land Appeal Court in 1991 and 1992; he was a member of the Supreme Court Rules Revision Committee from its inception in 1982; in that year and 1983 he prepared submissions on behalf of the Court with relation to proposed legislation for the establishment of the Mental Health Tribunal; and from the mid-80s he was joint author with Mr Justice Ryan and the later Master Weld, of the "Queensland Supreme Court Practice" published by Butterworths. Anticipating a modern imperative, Mr Justice Lee has always been actively involved in community affairs, especially with SPELD Queensland, the charity advancing the interests of learning disabled and illiterate children and adults, and the Shaftesbury Citizenship Council, as to disadvantaged youths at risk.

And so we farewell Mr Justice Lee, a great Judge, whose contribution to the juridical fabric of this State has been unique. He has worked very hard throughout his judicial career and applied an exceptional amount of anxiety and effort to the objective of getting the right result. He succeeded in this at a high level. He possessed and was prepared to apply the quality of commonsense. He had a better than average understanding of how society really works, and that is a valuable asset in any judge's repertoire. There are many valuable judgments left in his legacy. The loss of his experience will be a great loss to the Court.

And above all, we have known Bill and Iris Lee as very good people, people of stark honesty and dedication to good causes. They have always enthusiastically supported this great institution, and perceptively acknowledged its high significance as a vital arm of the government of the people. We will greatly miss their immediate involvement in the life of the Court. In hailing their substantial joint contribution, over many years, I express the profound gratitude of the State of Queensland, and warmly wish them well as they now go forth into interesting new

endeavours, together.