

ADMISSIONS CEREMONY

31 JANUARY 2005

AFTERNOON SESSION

On behalf of the judges of the Supreme Court, I congratulate you on your admission and warmly welcome you to the legal profession.

It is also fitting that I refer to the contribution to your success so far, made by families and friends, some of whom are present this afternoon.

Whether you practice as an advocate or in the more traditional solicitor's role in a legal firm, whether you become a sole practitioner or a member of a national or international mega-firm, whether you join the corporate world, the public service or academia, your admission as a solicitor today makes you a member of the legal profession.

The profession which you have joined has a proud tradition which dates back to the 13th century, when lawyers first emerged as a professional class in England. The specialist practitioners known as solicitors evolved in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

There have been many changes to the legal profession since Justice Mackenzie, Mr Justice Chesterman and I were admitted as practitioners last century, but I think some things do not change, like the happy expectations of newly admitted practitioners of greater financial reward. Attaining financial success is an entirely appropriate aspiration, but must always be secondary to your obligations as a legal practitioner, obligations which must never be clouded by commercial considerations. It is essential that you remember you are foremost officers of the Court

and are therefore ethically obliged to place your duty to the Court before your own personal interests or those of your clients.

How fortunate Queensland men and women are to live in an effective democracy, but it has not always been so. This month has heralded the very significant centenary of Queensland women receiving the right to vote, although indigenous women and men did not receive that right until after the 1967 Constitutional referendum. Later this year, we will celebrate another significant centenary: that of women having the right to be admitted as lawyers. Today, eighty-four women have been admitted to the Queensland legal profession. It is worth remembering that, until 1905, the term “person” in statutes authorising admission to the legal profession was understood not to include “women”. The right of women to be admitted as lawyers was an essential step in enabling women to exercise their full democratic rights. This is because an independent legal profession plays a vital role in a democracy, ensuring community access to the rule of law, that magnificent creature which gives equal justice for all, regardless of gender, race, colour, religion, power, wealth or sexual preference.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the US Supreme Court, in her book "The Majesty of the Law" observes that sadly many US lawyers today are dissatisfied with their professional lives, despite their high incomes. In Australia, too, the ever-increasing pressures of the legal commercial marketplace can take its toll in terms of job satisfaction. Access to the rule of law sometimes remains difficult for the poor, the disempowered and for many worthy community groups. Justice O'Connor reminds us in her book that there is no greater duty or pleasure for a lawyer than to ensure that there is indeed equal justice

under the law for the poor, the disadvantaged and the disenfranchised. It is not as widely known as it should be in the community that many lawyers do donate scores of hours of service in their busy lives to achieve this. Lawyers providing access to the law for these groups not only help others but bring meaning and joy to their own professional life and raise community confidence in the profession.

You have already demonstrated your intellectual abilities and your tenacity in obtaining your qualifications for admission as solicitors. You will ensure the legal profession with its fine history and traditions remains relevant in 21st century Australia by maintaining your profession's high ethical standards, including your over-riding duty to the Court as its officers; by offering your services to those who might not otherwise have access to justice and, if called upon, by protecting our democratic institutions, including the third arm of government, an independent judiciary.

You enter the profession with the Court's congratulations and warmest wishes. May you have many years of personal contentment and professional satisfaction.

Please be seated.

Before we adjourn, I add my words of thanks to those of the Chief Justice's earlier today to Ms Estelle Parker who has just attended her last admission ceremony after eleven and a half years as a staff member of the Barristers', Solicitors', and more recently, Legal Practitioners' Admission Boards. Ms Parker additionally worked for the previous 12 years in the

State Reporting Bureau. I thank you, Ms Parker, for your service to the legal profession and I wish you a healthy and happy retirement.

Adjourn the court.