



Opening of Art Exhibition Facilitated by Cairns City Council and Cairns Arts Society Supreme Courthouse, Cairns, 1 August 2006, 5.30 pm

**The Hon P de Jersey AC,
Chief Justice**

I am very pleased to be here this evening, and to be able to add my own welcome to you all to this fine courthouse. Your being here is a tribute to the resident judges, Justice Jones the Far Northern Judge, and Judges White and Bradley. Your presence also reflects this implicit acknowledgment: a courthouse is not just a collection of courtrooms.

Now that is not to gainsay the critical significance of the core function we judges discharge in those courtrooms. But the courthouse has a transcendent importance, as a major public institution, part of the mechanism of government, and striking of course for its independence. I emphasise the word 'public' institution. These are indeed the people's courts.

That being so, people must be encouraged into these precincts, which are their own community resource. In saying that, I am obviously not inviting an increase in the crime rate or the extent of civil disputation! I am encouraging people to come here to foster a better appreciation of what courts do: why a jury takes a particular course in a criminal trial; why a judge imposes a particular sentence: was is too lenient, too harsh, or about right; why a court grants or refuses bail; why a court makes orders confiscating the alleged proceeds of crime, grants injunctions ... the list goes on.

Courts are not sitting this evening, so you will not be able to assess those processes on this occasion. But by opening up the courthouse to this sort of community usage, we take a substantial step towards demystifying the court process: we begin to alert the passer-by to the fact that there is really significant work daily accomplished here, decisions made with dramatic ramifications for individual people, companies, the community, the State.

I am delighted Justice Jones has been able to secure these exceptional art works for the courthouse. I warmly thank the Cairns City Council, especially the Mayor Councillor Kevin Byrne, and the Cairns Art Society, for their preparedness to lend the works to the



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courthouse where, I guarantee, they will be protected in a particularly secure environment. I also thank the Deputy Director-General, Mr Jim McGowan, for his assistance in ensuring the proposal became a reality.

Importantly, the art enlivens a dramatic corridor – dramatic for the conflict evident here daily. These works will distract those in turmoil, and excite the visitor who may otherwise have condemned the courthouse as merely a dreary and depressing place.

We also note this evening the display on the third floor of the Supreme Court Library's exhibition, 'Women in the Law'. That exhibition was developed to mark the centenary last year of the enactment of the Legal Practitioners Act 1905, the legislation which first accorded Queensland women the right to be admitted as legal practitioners. That interesting exhibition will be followed by others from time to time from Brisbane, but also, importantly, exhibits generated in Far North Queensland, such as the display last year about the history of the legal profession in this great city.

The next display, after 'Women in the Law', will have a Shakespearean flavour. It was developed to coincide with the 8th World Shakespeare Congress held in Brisbane in July this year. The display is entitled: 'Shakespeare and the Law: Obligation, Vengeance and the Abuse of Power'. Interesting concepts in a courthouse: obligation, vengeance and the abuse of power – judges discharge their obligations without fail; litigants regrettably sometimes display a degree of vengeance; but abuse of power in these hallowed halls? Never!

In conclusion I revert to my theme: these exhibitions present the courthouse for its transcendent significance, as an important and interesting community resource.

I am now very pleased, ladies and gentlemen, formally to open the exhibition, and in doing so, I again warmly thank all who have contributed to its establishment.