



North Queensland Law Association Annual Conference  
Pullman International, Cairns  
Friday 16 May 2014, 9:30am

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**The Hon Paul de Jersey AC  
Chief Justice**

Some might say my privileged 43 legal career has lacked any elegant proportion, in that 29 years of measured life on the bench were preceded by only 13 or 14 frenetic years at the bar. But my less than frenetic subsequent judicial span has allowed me the valued opportunity to indulge a particular interest in country Queensland, where I spent the first 12 years of my life. As a Judge, I have immensely enjoyed circuit work, and over my last 16 years as Chief Justice, I have particularly relished the opportunities given me to meet with and seek to support regional practitioners. That involves no tilt against our metropolitan colleagues. It simply reflects our Queensland feature, which is that there are many substantial communities outside the south-east which need and deserve on-the-ground legal services.

I was substantially motivated, some years ago now, to oppose publicly the then federal government's push for national legal profession reform, by my fears over how much it would cost, and the impact of further financial imposts on sole or smaller firm practitioners, especially those with a limited client base, as in regional and suburban situations. We should uphold, rather than imperil, the provision of legal services in this State outside the capital.

Kaye and I have always appreciated being included in the annual North and Central Queensland Law Conferences: we will miss them. They have provided a wonderful opportunity to meet marvellous people, and to be reassured of the condition of the regional professions. Our ideal, which I believe we achieve, is a unified, State-wide profession, and the professional associations play an important part in fostering that. But as with the Anglican Church, diversity does not exclude unity.

As always, I pay tribute to my judicial colleagues from North and Far North Queensland, of all three State courts, and I thank them for their dedicated leadership.



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I have not spoken at length on these occasions over the years, and I do not intend disturbing that record today. But you will expect me to say something of what I have discerned over the last 29 years on the bench.

The most indelibly drawn impression is of the inevitability of change, something which would have greatly surprised me four decades ago as I entered a profession marked by tradition and predictability.

Think of some of the developments of even recent years: in the criminal jurisdiction, the virtual abolition of committals, majority verdicts, the availability of judge-only trials, allowing deliberating juries to separate, child witnesses giving evidence remotely, the way Judges instruct juries; on the civil side, the retreat from adversarialism with the embrace of mediation, the move from oral to written advocacy; and in all streams, the harnessing of on-line and other technology, and the pro bono initiative.

The list goes on, and will continue to do so as the years roll on.

I suggest what practitioners should draw from this is the importance of adaptability, for continuing change is inevitable as the system adapts to evolving community conditions and expectations.

I respectfully suggest that the most effective practitioner will foresee and anticipate likely progressive change and accommodate it, rather than, as of course, repelling it.

I warmly wish you all well as your careers progress, as you continue to discharge an important public responsibility in a vital part of the State. I hope your professional lives will be characterized by challenge and fulfilment, and your personal lives by happiness and contentment.