



VICTORIAN BAR

SPEECH

ADDRESS AT THE RETIREMENT OF HIS HONOUR MAGISTRATE PETER LAURITSEN, CHIEF MAGISTRATE OF THE MAGISTRATES COURT OF VICTORIA

**BY WENDY HARRIS QC,
PRESIDENT OF THE VICTORIAN BAR**

May it please the Court.

I appear on behalf of the Victorian Bar to farewell your Honour as Chief Magistrate of this court.

I also acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet, the Peoples of the Kulin Nation, and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Your Honour's service to this Court has been remarkable; you have been a member of the Court for over 30 years, with the last 7 years serving as the Chief Magistrate.

Many of your Honour's achievements have been addressed already; including that you are the first solicitor appointed Chief Magistrate to this court.

Your Honour was born in Brisbane, moving to Melbourne as a young child. Due to your Honour's father's military career you spent a few years in Germany before returning to Melbourne in 1964. Your Honour went to the University of Melbourne, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws in 1968.

Your Honour undertook the practical legal training course at the Leo Cussen Institute (as it then was) and was admitted to practice in 1975. Your Honour remained in practice as a solicitor for 12 years, and to the Bar's great loss, rather than being called to the Bar, you were appointed as a Magistrate for the Northern Territory in 1987.

After 2 years in the Northern Territory, your Honour was appointed to this Court and it is here that you have carved out your extraordinary career; as a Magistrate since 1989, as Deputy Chief Magistrate since 2003 and finally, as Chief Magistrate since 2012.

Your Honour's appointment as Chief Magistrate of this court in December 2012 was described by your colleagues and peers as 'the perfect appointment'. It was said that



the 'Magistracy is in very safe hands'; and so it has proved for the last 7 years during your tenure as Chief Magistrate.

Your reputation for hard work is unparalleled; working at least 6 days a week, every single week. When your Honour was a Magistrate at Broadmeadows, you were known to travel all over Melbourne to assist with your colleagues' workload in your 'free time', when you had finished your list 'early' (which, more often than not, was still 4.00pm or later). Your Honour still sits at least twice a week, often sitting 4 times a week, despite your Honour's workload as Chief Magistrate.

No doubt, it is because of this commitment, your Honour has achieved an enormous amount...

... which is even more remarkable given that it is miraculous that anyone could ever determine what your Honour had written down.

Your Honour is famous (perhaps infamous) for having arguably the most indecipherable handwriting of any judicial officer. Probably ever.

His Honour, Judge Ginnane, who served previously as a Magistrate, tells how frantic he would become whenever he found a handwritten note left on his desk from your Honour (at least, he assumed it was from you). Often enough it would be attached to an extract from a draft rule change or such like.

It was then up to his Honour to try and discern from the note whether it was for approval, comment or called for some other action. His Honour recalls that he would spend an inordinate amount of his time seeking opinions as to your Honour's penmanship from his judicial colleagues. When on occasion, after all else had failed, and he confronted your Honour over it, more often than not, your Honour was also completely stumped.

Obviously, translation of your Honour's hieroglyphics, was not insurmountable as your Honour has clearly managed to get many things done.

Your Honour's achievements and legacies include Chairing the Court's Civil Rules Committee, which achieved alignment of the rules of civil procedure in the Magistrates' Court with those of the County and Supreme Courts; an exercise which took a number of years and a great deal of work which you tirelessly championed. Your Honour served as the Chair of this Court's Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee, successfully developing mechanisms for resolving civil disputes quickly and inexpensively.



As Chief Magistrate, your Honour will be remembered for the suite of measures that were implemented to improve judicial wellbeing in this court. You reduced sitting times to 10.00am – 4.00pm in line with other jurisdictions, and you introduced non-sitting days to allow time to write decisions, as well as wellbeing support for all judicial officers at the court.

Your Honour has overseen with great satisfaction the growth of the Koori list at VOCAT (Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal) and it has been said to be one of the court's great success stories.

Your Honour's substantial legacy results from your unwavering commitment to the court that you serve. As you said at the time of your appointment to the role of Chief Magistrate: "The process of Court reform is ongoing, and it is my intention to continue to find ways to improve our services and make them more efficient." You have been good to your word.

It is evident that your Honour cares deeply about this court, the people that you work with and their wellbeing. Your Honour is greatly respected; you treat everyone that you encounter equally and with fairness and you are said always to see the best in people, and by so doing, to bring out the best in them. Your Honour is known for your consultative approach to all that you do; your humility in recognising the expertise of others and your trust and respect in their advice.

Your Honour is said to have a dry but quick and well developed sense of humour. One early morning, while your Honour was standing at the lift door with one of your colleagues, you inquired of his wellbeing. The colleague paused, perhaps too long, prompting you to exclaim: "Good Lord, he intends to reserve."

There is however, one group of people who are less dismayed about your Honour's departure from this Court. The managers of the fleet of judicial motor vehicles owned by Court Services Victoria collectively take a deep breath whenever your car approaches the underground car park of the Magistrates' Court, where your Honour engages a technique known as 'touch parking', whereby I am told your Honour drives the car with great skill into the allocated space, and maintain forward motion until your car is stopped by the concrete wall. Then you hop out and go about your day, like this is a perfectly normal thing to do. Such was the concern of your judicial colleagues, they kindly installed a rubber wheel against the wall to protect your cars from damage. Or perhaps it was the wall.



I hope that today's reflections on your career have been a useful "aide-memoire". I am told that at recent speech that your Honour gave, you were taken aback by your introduction, confessing that you had forgotten about 95% of what you had done!

On behalf of the Victorian Bar, I wish your Honour a long and happy retirement (when it finally arrives) and wish you joy and satisfaction as you transition to your Honour's new role as a Reserve Judge of the County Court.

May it please the Court.