



ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT, MS REBECCA TRESTON QC,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VALEDICTORY CEREMONY FOR  
DEPUTY PRESIDENT DEIRDRE SWAN  
QUEENSLAND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMISSION  
ON FRIDAY 10 MAY 2019

May it please the court.

Deputy President, before we reflect on your long standing career as Commissioner and Deputy President of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, we should first cast our minds back to the early 1980's.

In those early days, you were an active member of the Australian Workers Union, working as a delegate for the tote operators of the Queensland racing industry, and later becoming an AWU organiser where you looked after members working in hospitals, and on roads, construction, concrete works and sawmilling. All the while, you were in the midst of studying your arts and law degree at the University of Queensland and looking after your children. You excelled in your role at the AWU. You were the first female elected organiser in the history of the AWU, and later became elected Queensland branch vice-president and national vice-president. You are often described as an AWU Queensland heavyweight, with a strong passion for looking after the interests of many marginalised individuals such as migrants, women and young workers.

Your involvement with the Australian Workers Union was indicative of the commitment you were to display at the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

You completed your studies at the University of Queensland in 1990, and hold the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws. You were admitted as a barrister in Queensland. Your work within the industrial relations sector saw you become appointed as Commissioner of the QIRC in September 1990.

You have served as the Deputy President of the QIRC 16 years – a remarkable period of longevity and of service. Over your long career as Deputy President, you have presided over numerous important hearings of the Full Bench of the Industrial Commission and conducted various conciliation conferences which spanned across different industries such as health, mining and education.

Throughout the 45 years you have been involved in the industrial relations sphere, you have been a role model. Notably, you were the second woman appointed as Commissioner, and the

first woman appointed as Deputy President of the QIRC. Your emergence as a female trailblazer was no doubt inspired by your mother, Kathleen, who sent you to school even though you were not of school age and who encouraged you to undertake a commercial course at school.

The accolades on your retirement have been significant. You are described as very conscientious in all respects. You are widely known as an effective conciliator, a good judge of character, and an avid advocate for ensuring that all parties have a fair hearing. However, it was always a good practice to ensure accurate quoting of earlier evidence or submissions as your shorthand, garnered in your earlier working life, ensured that there was invariably a version of a real time transcript from which to work.

The well-earned words used to describe your skills, diligence and good grace are a testament to your abilities and expertise, and a demonstration of the high regard in which you were held amongst members of the Commission and the profession.

Your court room has always been a model of civility, and not a little humour. You always strove to defuse the sometimes heated exchanges experienced in industrial relations matters and encouraged as relaxed an atmosphere as possible. When he was a practising barrister, Walter Sofronoff QC made a rare appearance before you as a Deputy President of the Industrial Commission. When, during his submissions, the then Mr Sofronoff addressed you as “*Deputy Commissioner*”, you were quick to respond “*Oh, you’ve demoted me*”, to which learned counsel could only reply “*I don’t get down here very often.*” With good grace you quickly reassured him that you were only joking and the hearing proceeded with a smile.

Aside from your work inside the court room, you have also undertaken an active participation in a number of Queensland Industrial Relations Commission initiatives. In 2006, you were one of three panel members tasked to lead an inquiry to examine the impact of the federal government’s *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act 2005*, on Queensland workplaces, employees and employers. The Inquiry led to the Queensland Government introducing legislation to establish a Queensland Workplace Rights Ombudsman and to create a Queensland Workplace Rights Office. You were also a member of various industry panels within the Commission such as Disability services, Agriculture, and Building and Construction. In January 2010, you were appointed to Fair Work Australia whilst maintaining your commission at the QIRC.

As we reflect on your career, it is clear that your sense of service was not confined to the court room. Your passion for industrial relations saw you become a guest lecturer to students studying industrial law at the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University. For good measure, you also instigated a program for work experience students within the QIRC and presented a number of industrial relations papers at conferences both internationally and in Australia. Your efforts to educate and impart your knowledge to others was recognised in the 2008 Address-in Reply of then MP Yvette D’Ath to the Governor

General's Speech. In her address, the Attorney General (then MP) thanked you for the knowledge you imparted while the Attorney General was working as your associate in 1992.

You have been an active supporter of the Bar and a regular attendee at the Bar Association's Industrial Relations conferences, and for that the Bar thanks you.

Outside of work, of course, your family has taken high priority. No doubt your well refined bargaining and negotiation skills have been a useful addition to the toolbox of parental skills. Just this morning I was reliably informed you also satisfy the much coveted criteria of best ever grandmother.

Your conviviality in court and at conferences has been matched by your demeanour in all social settings. One member of the Bar recalls encountering you strolling the aisles of the local supermarket, and happily engaging in such a chat with him that he had to be reminded to pay for his groceries before he left the store, so engrossed was he in a conversation with you at the checkout.

The Bar Association of Queensland thanks you sincerely for your service to the court and the community. It is no small commitment to spend the years that you have on the Bench in what is a most challenging environment.

The Bar Association and its members extend to you and your family the very best wishes for the future.

May it please the court.