



Law Council
OF AUSTRALIA

2017 President's Award

Speech delivered by Fiona McLeod SC, President of the Law Council of Australia at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

30 November 2017

Now it is my very great honour to present the President's Award, a very special award to acknowledge and celebrate exceptional achievement in our profession.

The President's Award is selected by a judging panel of former Law Council Presidents, including those here tonight Stuart Clark, Duncan McConnell and Joe Catanzariti. I thank them for their time.

The panel considers candidates on the basis of the award's criteria, that they be an outstanding example to the Australian legal profession and to those who might seek to join its ranks; and that they have 'brought credit to the profession through a commitment to the law which has been both personal and professional.'

Tonight's winner has done this and far more besides.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to announce that the Law Council President's Award for 2017 goes to Dr David John Neal SC.

David Neal was admitted to practice in Victoria on 3 March 1975 – although obviously you would never guess to look at him.

Since that time the breadth and depth of his personal and professional commitment has been quite remarkable.

David has achieved excellence in the practice of the law in his more than 24 years at the Victorian Bar.

But equally significant has been his prodigious commitment and substantial contributions to legal policy, the development and improvement of law, and the administration of justice.

In particular, I believe the nation has benefited from David's work in relation to legal aid and access to justice.

Indeed, the Law Council of Australia owes David something of unique debt.

For ten years now, he has served on our Access to Justice Committee – since last year as Co-Chair.

He made a substantial contribution to the Law Council's submission to the Productivity Commission Report on Access to Justice.

He appeared on behalf of the Law Council to deliver its oral submissions to the Productivity Commission.

He made a substantial contribution to the program development of the Biennial Access to Justice Conference.

He represented the Law Council on the Commonwealth Attorney-General's National Legal Aid Advisory Board.

And he served as Co-Chair of the Law Council's influential National Legal Aid Campaign – Legal Aid Matters.

For ten years David has also sat on the Criminal Law Committee, contributing a tower of Law Council submissions on Criminal Law reform. He has regularly appeared on behalf of the Law Council before the relevant Commonwealth Parliamentary Committees.

And this year I have been tremendously grateful for David's wisdom, insight, and friendship as a member of the Justice Project Steering Committee.

Of course, David's enormous contribution to the profession extends beyond his work with the Law Council.

David served as a full-time Commissioner of the Victorian Law Reform Commission for three years from 1987.

He has made a prodigious contribution to the community of the Victorian Bar and to the wider community of the national profession in his very active and substantial service on significant legal policy and access to Justice Committees.

And he has compiled, as one might expect from one with an academic background and bent, a truly formidable list of publications.

In short, David Neal is an outstanding example to any Australian lawyer.

His achievements and his contributions as a scholar, as a researcher, as a teacher, as a public servant, and as a practising barrister are belied by his quiet modesty and genuine concern for his fellow citizens.

He is an extremely deserving recipient of this high honour.

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