



FAMILY COURT JUDGE RETIRES

Justice Michael Watt will retire on Monday 15 December after 10 years on the bench of the Family Court of Australia.

Chief Justice Diana Bryant said that Justice Watt was one of the first judges in Melbourne to hear cases in his docket under the less adversarial model.

“Justice Watt’s steady and thoughtful approach while helping to pioneer what has become the standard approach to children’s cases helped to extend the process from Sydney and Parramatta to Melbourne.

“He will be particularly remembered for his patience and rapport with self represented litigants,” she said.

Prior to retiring, Justice Watt was the chair of the Rules Committee and therefore a member of the Chief Justice’s Policy Advisory Committee. He was also a member of the Court’s Law Reform Committee.

The Chief Justice said Justice Watt had made a significant contribution to family law in Australia.

While in practice he launched ‘Current Family Law’, a specialist journal of six issues per year, in 1992 and continued to be an editor and contributor after it was acquired by LBC Information Services.

He also held the following positions:

- member of the Law Council of Australia’s Family Law Committee in 1983
- member of the first executive of the Family Law Section of the Law Council of Australia in 1985 and soon after became the founding editor of ‘Australian Family Lawyer’
- chair of the organising committee for the Family Law Section’s third national conference in Melbourne during 1987-88
- elected deputy chairman of the Family Law Section executive in 1994, and held that post until November 1998
- vice chairman of the Victorian Family Law Bar Association from 1986 to 1998, and from May 1998, its chair.

Justice Watt was admitted to practice in 1976, signed the roll in 1978 and was appointed Queen’s Counsel in 1994. He read with Paul Guest who became Justice Guest of the Family Court and his only reader was Chief Justice Bryant.

Justice Watt was born in Scotland and educated in New Zealand and Perth. He graduated with a Bachelor of Laws with Honours from Melbourne University in 1975 and a Master of Laws from Monash University in 1978.

“My judicial colleagues, the staff and the profession wish Justice Watt and his wife, who is also a member of the Court staff, a long and happy retirement and I am sure I speak for them all when I say he will be missed,” Chief Justice Bryant said.

In his retirement, Justice Watt is looking forward to spending time with his family, travelling in remote Australia as well as overseas and pursuing interests in languages, music and indigenous rock art.

“I wish my judicial colleagues and all staff of the Court well in the new family law landscape awaiting them in 2009,” Justice Watt said.



FAMILY COURT OF AUSTRALIA

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