

Welcome Ceremony:

Judge Patricia Cope

Friday, 15 October 2021, 10 am

Courtroom 1, Level 4 Supreme Court Building

5D Sheridan St, Cairns

- May it please the Court. I am thrilled to be here today, on behalf of the solicitors of Queensland, to welcome Your Honour as a Judge of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.
- The Society's 2021 President, Elizabeth Shearer, extends her apologies, having been called before Parliamentary Committee hearings today, but requested I extend her personal congratulations to Your Honour.
- Following Your Honour's appointment to the Federal Circuit Court in Cairns in July 2021, I note President Shearer welcomed the appointment, highlighting Your Honour's experience particularly with reference to your outstanding leadership, inspiring young female practitioners throughout regional Queensland.

- Whilst Your Honour originally commenced practice in Victoria, you made the very wise decision to relocate to Queensland and none other than beautiful Cairns, a decision that would serve you well and one from which the community and local legal profession would benefit.
- Not only has Your Honour devoted herself to professional advancement, including through the well-deserved recognition as an Accredited Specialist in family law and family violence matters, you have recognised the value of your experience and expertise and worked closely with and at the coal face of the community with those in need, including through your work with Legal Aid Queensland as well as through your volunteer work with the North Queensland Womens Legal Service.
- Queensland solicitors are proud of Your Honour's conviction to ensure access to justice and assist some of the most vulnerable in our society.

- There is no doubt it is a day for celebration when a leading and respected practitioner such as Your Honour, at the peak of their legal career, accepts a commission as a judge of this Court.
- The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia may be Australia's newest court, but its jurisdiction is as long-standing as it is significant to the lives of so many Australians.
- The very nature of this jurisdiction, dealing with such fundamental human needs involved in the breakdown of relationships is close to the core of many people's lived experience.
- This complex role means this Court sits at a high profile point of intersection between the deeply personal experience of many and the judicial arm of government. This Court and its predecessors have been more scrutinised and more reformed than most other Courts.

- It is no secret that resourcing available for doing equal justice in family law matters has been insufficient to meet the demands for many years.
- Yet every day the Honourable Judges of the former family law courts and now this Honourable Court preside, tasked with the vital job of discerning the best interests of children or the just and equitable division of property.
- The Judges of this jurisdiction work in a system that few in our community really understand, yet many engage with and some openly criticise. Everyone has a family, many have engaged with the Court or know someone who has and everyone has an opinion.
- The stark truth is that few easy cases come before this Court: the stakes could not be much higher; the repercussions of decisions made by the Judges can endure for decades; yet many litigants do not have the benefit of legal representation to put their case. This places the Judge in an invidious position of being both arbiter and guide of the process.

- The role of the Judge, as the human face representing the State intervening in the most personal part of people's lives, is no easy task.
- It requires wide knowledge of complex legal principles beyond the Family Law Act, ranging from the law of equity to insolvency.
- It requires sharp intelligence to discern relevance in a jurisdiction where the discretion in the court is wide.
- Finally it requires compassionate wisdom – based on a deep understanding of the human condition, from which comes respect for, and patience with, litigants and their legal representatives.
- **Judge Cope**, you possess these qualities in abundance and Your Honour's appointment could not be more appropriate.
- Your breadth and depth of experience makes you ideally suited for the many types challenges to be found in the proceedings before this Court.

- You possess a deep and recognised expertise in family law matters as highlighted by the accreditation to which I have already referred.
- That recognition acknowledged you in two important ways:
 - it formally recognised your high level of competency and knowledge in your chosen area of legal practice, and
 - it set you out as a legal practitioner who was truly a leader.
- Not only does Your Honour bring high legal skills to this position, but as a highly respected and leading local legal practitioner you also bring a deep understanding and care for this Community.
- The benefits of appointing local leading practitioners to single Judge registries is immense. In this jurisdiction, dealing as it does with fundamental human needs – empathy and solidarity with the local community is both critical and invaluable.

- Your Honour has always fulfilled your role as a leader in the profession admirably, contributing generously over many years holding positions of responsibility at the Queensland Law Society.
- Notably your years of service on our family law policy committee and our Specialist Advisory Committee for Family Law are deeply appreciated by the Queensland Law Society and its members.
- Your Honour's warmth, positivity and support of your committee colleagues has been often mentioned by those who worked with you.
- Members who know you also remark upon your generosity in tutoring and mentoring the next generation of the profession and inspiring young female practitioners throughout regional Queensland.
- Your Honour has always brought the warmth of your humanity to your colleagues and your community.

- Your firm's Facebook page highlights this. It is crowded with congratulations from young female practitioners who have had the good fortune to be assisted in their careers by Your Honour.
- In fact, even matters as usually dry as End of Financial Year were marked on Facebook with colourful images and endless enthusiasm. This bodes well for the Court Registry copy room.
- Queensland's solicitors extend a warm congratulations to you on your appointment and we look forward to following your successes during your tenure.
- May it please the Court.