

APPOINTMENTS

His Honour Judge Steven Middleton

His Honour Judge Steven Middleton was welcomed to the Federal Circuit Court of Australia during a ceremonial sitting in the Newcastle Registry on 24 November 2015.

Speaking on behalf of the New South Wales Bar, Peter Cummings SC welcomed the appointment as a ‘valuable addition to the bench of this hard-pressed court’. Cummings SC said:

It seemed that following the retirement of Judge Coakes four months ago litigants from across the Hunter region and beyond might overwhelm the Newcastle registry of the Federal Circuit Court. Disputes needed resolution. People sought protection. Lives were left on hold. Now, the whole of the New South Wales Bar, and the Newcastle Bar in particular, greets this appointment with enthusiasm enhanced by relief. ... While we wished this day had come sooner, we congratulate the Commonwealth attorney-general for making what is clearly an astute appointment.

Judge Middleton’s career in the law began in earnest, as it did for many judicial officers before him, when he joined the NSW Police in 1985 and entered the ranks of Police prosecutors. He graduated with a Diploma of Law from the NSW Legal Practitioners’ Admissions Board in 1995. He completed his practical legal training at the College of Law in 1996 before his admission as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of NSW that same year.

In the ensuing decade his Honour built up a very successful practice consisting mainly of criminal and family law – first in New South Wales and then on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast.

His Honour was admitted to the Queensland Bar in July 2007 under the pupillage of Catherine McMillan QC and Mark Stunden. He took a room and practised at the Inns of Court in Maroochydore. In 2013 he relocated his practice to Brisbane Chambers.

Although the antecedents of his private practice lay in criminal law, his Honour was increasingly drawn to family law – defined broadly to include cases in child protection, domestic violence and mediation. Often, he appeared as an independent children’s lawyer. Cummings SC noted that his Honour’s suitability for judicial office was based on more than knowledge of the law:

You are said to have an innately judicial temperament: calm and considered; empathetic yet realistic; firm but fair. There is a widespread expectation among barristers on both sides of the Tweed that your Honour will relish the role of Federal Circuit Court judge and approach the burdens of this new office with your characteristic vim and vigour.

The latter was a reference to his Honour’s reputation for ‘daunting powers of physical and mental endurance’. Cummings SC continued:

[Y]our colleagues are full of admiration for your ability to compete in ironman triathlons and a six-day 251 km ultramarathon in the Sahara Desert. There may be days ahead when your Honour longs for the relative ease of the half way mark in the Sahara! Though your Honour’s achievements are undoubtedly feats of endurance, they are also manifestations of discipline and focus on the task at hand.

...

[T]he bar is satisfied that you will bring a formidable capacity for hard work and efficiency to bear upon the workload that lies before you.

Appointments to the Local Court

Magistrates Paul Hayes and Ross Hudson were sworn-in on 23 November 2015.

Magistrate Paul Hayes graduated from Macquarie University with a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Laws in 1986. He was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of New South Wales on 18 December 1987 and began his career in the law working as a solicitor at Marsdens. After a stint with the Crown Prosecution Service in the UK in the first half of 1990, he returned to Australia and in September of that year accepted a position at Legal Aid NSW.

His Honour ascended through the ranks of Legal Aid, from legal officer in the Central Sydney, Liverpool, Burwood and Fairfield offices. In 2000 his Honour featured in Bernard Lagan’s poignant article on ‘cheap drugs and hurried justice’. In it, you are described as the ‘harassed but always polite Legal Aid lawyer’, who tries to put his mind to rest as he travels home to his family. The article concludes with a quote from your Honour: ‘Winning is not what it is about. It’s about ensuring that the system does, at the end of the day, spit out justice’.