

Admissions Ceremony

11 November 2002

Chief Justice's observations

On behalf of the Judges, I congratulate you. Your admission today signifies great achievement, and signals your capacity to serve your community with distinction.

Public service underpins your new profession. In acting for clients, you will indirectly benefit the community through providing the expert legal services necessary for the civilized resolution of disputes, and for the orderly advancement of individual interests. More fundamentally, you become now part of the mechanism which assures the linchpin of civil society, the rule of law.

To the discharge of these responsibilities you will, we trust, bring integrity, intellect and judgment; and as well we hope, compassionate regard for those less fortunate. The involvement of lawyers in the provision of services pro bono or at reduced rates is strongly encouraged, and we ask you to regard it as a natural corollary of the privilege you now enjoy.

Most of you will enter into practice as lawyers, and in doing so, you will participate in the life of a noble profession, where collegial interaction is a markedly beneficial feature. I urge you to involve yourselves actively in professional life, especially the programs of continuing legal education.

Public regard for the Queensland legal profession has this year been blighted by revelations of rapacity, and serious failures in the handling of complaints against solicitors. Lawyers should be paragons of ethical commitment and powerhouses of professional expertise and efficiency. We have been, are, deeply concerned that the apparent default of a few has eroded, to any extent, confidence in the profession broadly. Maintenance of professional standards, thence public confidence, is vitally important to the due administration of justice.

The President of Queensland Law Society has informed me he intends to release today former Chief Judge Shanahan's report on the Society's processes for dealing with complaints. I have read that report. Judge Shanahan proposes a range of reforms, some of which are already in process of implementation. If genuinely pursued, the changes and streamlining he recommends should help reverse the erosion of confidence to which I have referred. I am satisfied the Law Society will do its utmost in that regard. Its substantial challenge is to make these revised processes work, and with an economical application of resources.

I hope what you draw from these events is the primacy of utter professionalism: only by striving for that pinnacle will you ensure that inherently fragile thing called reputation remains high.

And so you go forward, with our good wishes, which we extend also to your families and friends who no doubt have assisted you substantially to your present pinnacle. I hope you will continue to draw strength and inspiration from their wise counsel.

Finally, to those of you who may not enter into legal practice as such, you will of course remain lawyers, and that distinction will always signify both mental acuity and ethical commitment.

We again congratulate you, ladies and gentlemen, and warmly wish you well.