



SUPREME COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

David Malcolm Justice Centre
28 Barrack Street
Perth WA 6000

22 October 2021

MEDIA STATEMENT – SENIOR COUNSEL APPOINTMENTS 2021

The Chief Justice of Western Australia, the Hon Justice Peter Quinlan, today announced the appointment of seven Senior Counsel for 2021, after 21 applications were received.

The appointments are Mr Geoffrey Bourhill, Mr Steven Jones, Mr Darren Renton, Ms Clare Thompson, Mr Griff Ranson, Mr Terry Palmer and Ms Robin Cohen.

Five of the appointees practise as barristers, one is counsel within the State Solicitor's Office and one is counsel within Legal Aid WA.

Appointment as Senior Counsel is based on eminence in the practice of law, especially in advocacy, unquestioned integrity, availability and independence. A committee advises the Chief Justice on applications for appointment.

The Committee, chaired by Chief Justice Quinlan, comprised the President of the Court of Appeal (the Hon Justice Buss), the Senior Judge of the Supreme Court (the Hon Justice Le Miere), the President of the State Administrative Tribunal (the Hon Justice Pritchard), a judge of the Federal Court (the Hon Justice Banks-Smith), the Chief Judge of the Family Court (the Hon Justice Sutherland) and the Chief Judge of the District Court (Chief Judge Wager).

The consultation process conducted by the Chief Justice incorporated the opinion of in excess of a hundred members of the legal profession and the judiciary. In that regard, in addition to the opinions of all of the superior court judges communicated by the Committee, the Chief Justice met with:

- a committee of six of the currently practising Senior Counsel in Western Australia, who communicated the opinions of the 45 practising senior counsel;
- the President of the Law Society, who communicated the opinions of a committee of seven members of the Law Society;
- the President of the WA Bar Association, who communicated the opinions of a committee of 12 members of the Association;
- representatives of Women Lawyers of Western Australia;

- the President of the Family Law Practitioners Association, who communicated the opinions of a committee of six members of the Association;
- a representative of both the Australian Lawyers Alliance and Australian Insurance Law Association, who communicated the opinions of the committees of those Associations;
- the President of the Criminal Lawyers' Association;
- the Chief Commissioner of the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission;
- the Solicitor General; and
- the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The Senior Counsel appointed are as follows.

Mr Geoffrey Bourhill SC

Mr Bourhill was admitted to practice in 1981 and has practised as an independent barrister since 2016 from Francis Burt Chambers. Prior to joining the Bar, he practised, including as a partner, at private law firms in Western Australia.

Mr Bourhill specialises in personal injuries law. His practice includes professional indemnity claims acting for the insurers of doctors, hospitals and lawyers. Mr Bourhill was previously a member of the legal panels of several insurance and accident commissions and is currently a member of the Law Society's Courts Committee.

Mr Steven Jones SC

Mr Jones was admitted to practice in 1983 and has practised as an independent barrister since 2000, most recently from Francis Burt Chambers. Prior to joining the Bar, he practised in criminal law for 10 years.

Since joining the Bar, Mr Jones' principal area of practice has been in family law and protection and care matters in the Children's Court. He regularly appears as an independent children's lawyer in the Family Court and is also briefed by the Department of Communities in protection matters. Mr Jones regularly acts as the chairperson in family law mediations and conducts lectures for the Family Law Practitioners Association.

Mr Darren Renton SC

Mr Renton was admitted to practice in 1994 and has practised as an independent barrister since 2010 from John Toohey Chambers. Prior to joining the Bar, he was a Crown Prosecutor with the Commonwealth DPP.

Mr Renton maintains a national criminal law practice. He has conducted examinations at the Corruption and Crime Commission and has also been counsel assisting at a local government inquiry. Mr Renton has been the Chair of the Professional Standards Committee for the Anglican Diocese of Perth since 2015 and the Vice President of the Criminal Lawyers Association since 2020. He is also a part time member of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Ms Clare Thompson SC

Ms Thompson was admitted to practice in Western Australia in 1994. She has practised as an independent barrister since 2004 from Francis Burt Chambers. Prior to joining the Bar, she practised at a private law firm in Western Australia.

Ms Thompson practises principally in taxation disputes, but also practises in banking law and estates and probate litigation. Ms Thompson has been President of Women Lawyers of WA since 2019. She has served on the Legal Costs Committee since 2005 and was appointed its Chair in 2016. Ms Thompson also regularly presents seminars for Legalwise, the Law Society and the Piddington Society.

Mr Griff Ranson SC

Mr Ranson was admitted to practice in Western Australia in 1997. He has worked with the Crown/State Solicitor's Office since 1996 and was appointed Senior Assistant State Counsel in 2007.

Mr Ranson specialises in native title and Aboriginal heritage matters and has appeared as counsel for the State of Western Australia since 1998. He has acted as a mentor to junior practitioners at the State Solicitor's Office and has presented, over several years, an annual native title education module for law graduates and restricted practitioners within Government.

Mr Terry Palmer SC

Mr Palmer was admitted to practice in 1998 and has practised as an independent barrister since 2008, most recently from Quayside Chambers. Prior to joining the Bar, Mr Palmer worked for several private practices and was a Special Counsel at the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

Mr Palmer specialises in commercial practice. A significant portion of his practice involves disputes arising from construction projects in the mining and oil and gas sectors. He was formerly the treasurer of the WA Bar Association and has taught the WA Bar's Essential Trial Advocacy Course since 2017. Mr Palmer has been a member of the Human Research Ethics Committee and Women and Newborn Health Service for several years.

Ms Robin Cohen SC

Ms Cohen was admitted to practice in Western Australia in 2003. She practises in family and child protection law and is employed by Legal Aid as a senior solicitor and independent children's lawyer.

During her time as an Acting Magistrate of the Family Court of Western Australia, she became the first magistrate to convene culturally sensitive court hearings. Ms Cohen has conducted legal education seminars for the medical profession and also provides Legal Aid training on topics including advocacy, ethics and the rights and voice of the child.

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