

The Hon Justice Geoffrey Nettle

Geoffrey Nettle QC was sworn-in as a judge of the High Court of Australia on 3 February 2015.

His Honour was born in Cottesloe (WA) but grew up in Victoria where he studied at Bennettswood State School in Burwood, Victoria, before attending Wesley College in Melbourne. His Honour completed an Economics degree at the Australian National University, then worked for a year at Treasury before undertaking a law degree at Melbourne University from where his Honour graduated in 1975 with First Class Honours. His Honour then read for the BCL at Oxford where he was taught evidence by Rupert Cross, conflict of laws by JHC Morris and restitution by Peter Birk and graduated with a First in 1976.

Returning from Oxford, his Honour's professional career began as an articled clerk of the firm then known as Mallesons. Within five years he became a partner of the firm. He was called to the bar in 1982. His Honour read with Hartley Hansen, QC, later Justice Hansen of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal of Victoria, and with Justice Hayne.

As a junior barrister, his Honour had a reputation for being a prodigious and efficient worker, quickly developing a reputation as a hard-working and able advocate. His Honour was involved in what has frequently been described as the 'arduous' 1991 *Bank of Melbourne* trial in the Victorian Supreme Court, for the bank, as a junior to Hayne QC, in which his Honour's reputation as a formidable trial lawyer and cross examiner were cemented. His Honour took silk in 1992.

The Commonwealth attorney-general, Senator the Hon George Brandis QC, noted his Honour's talent for recalling leading cases from almost any field of law from memory. The attorney continued:

As an appellate advocate, the depth of your Honour's knowledge of the law and your firm grasp of legal principle was evident. When you appeared at first instance, you were both a feared and an admired cross-examiner. Your Honour is known for wearing your erudition modestly, and not seeking personal acclaim for your work.

At the bar, you were enormously supportive of colleagues, in particular junior colleagues, with a leadership style that inspired junior barristers to excellence. That commitment to the professional wellbeing of your colleagues was evident in the enthusiastic reaction of so many of them to your appointment to this Court.

Your Honour is an exemplar of the highest levels of integrity and the ethical standards of the bar. Between 1989 and 2002, your Honour demonstrated a commitment to public service as a part-time member of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and its predecessor, balancing that work with the demanding practice you then conducted.



In July 2002, his Honour was appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria and in 2004 he was appointed to the Court of Appeal of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

Outside the law his Honour enjoys sailing and still sails the Jubilee class sailing boat he bought many years ago and still owns the 1946 Mark IV Jaguar that he bought whilst at university, and lovingly restored. His Honour has three children.

The attorney concluded that his Honour is regarded by bench and bar alike as one of Australia's finest jurists.

His Honour observed that the magnitude of the court's development of Australian law over the last 40 years and the court's fluidity of approach and depth of understanding in that time represents standards that are 'phenomenal' and 'inspiring'. His Honour stated, in light of that history, that 'to say that I am excited about beginning on the task to which I have been sworn this morning would be a very considerable understatement.

His Honour concluded:

At the same time I remain acutely conscious that this Court is both the custodian of the Constitution and the final arbiter of the Australian common law. There is no court above it to detect and correct one's errors. The role which I take up today thus entails extraordinary responsibilities and it is impossible not to be aware of the heavy burden of trust which that means is now placed in me.