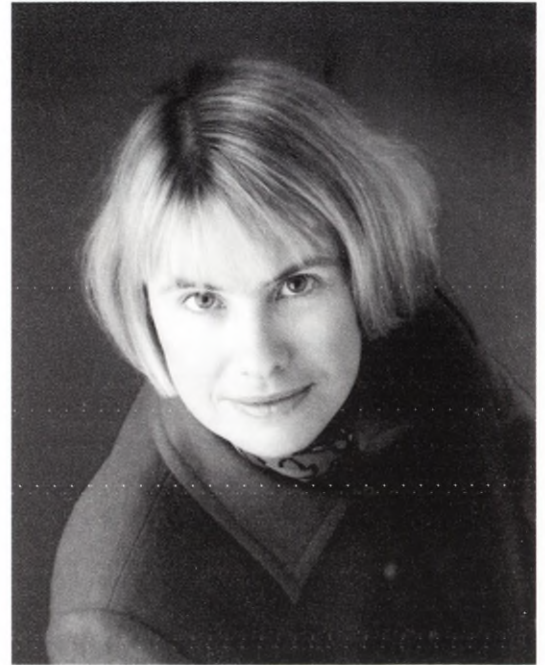


# Catherine Cheek



Catherine Cheek is committed to acting for plaintiffs. She sees it as something of a vocation. But it was not always so.

Before joining the legal profession, Catherine had her eyes set on a career in media and began a journalism degree at the University of Queensland. But within 12 months she'd had enough of the course so she enrolled in an arts/law degree. Her plan was to have a law qualification to 'fall back on' before beginning a dramatic career at NIDA.

During university, articles and the early years as a junior solicitor, Catherine ran a speech and drama studio in Ipswich, teaching children performance skills. She regularly acted, crewed and occasionally directed for Ipswich and Toowoomba repertory theatres.

She can't pinpoint exactly when she accepted she wasn't heading for Hollywood any time soon, but it was certainly by the time she started work for Shine Roche McGowan in Toowoomba in 1992, specialising in personal injuries litigation.

Catherine found that Shine Roche McGowan encouraged young lawyers to extend themselves and to constantly test their limits, while at the same time accepting that they're not going to be successful every time.

'Being given the opportunity to try to push the boundaries of your own experience and those of established law is very exciting,' Catherine says.

'The person who has had the single most important impact on my development as a lawyer and my passion for acting for plaintiffs is Stephen Roche because of his encouragement in testing my own abilities.'

In October 1998, Catherine became a partner at Shine Roche McGowan and shortly afterwards was asked to head up the firm's medical negligence division.

There began the development of her fascination with medical negligence law, which she says is endless in variety and interest.

In mid-2000, Catherine and her family left Toowoomba so she could work at Shine Roche McGowan's Brisbane office.

Two years later she accepted an associateship at Maurice Blackburn Cashman's Brisbane office and the opportunity to work in a national firm with very experienced medical negligence lawyers.

Catherine is currently the APLA National Medical Negligence Special Interest Group Chair.

'This position allows me to make a contribution in addressing some of the difficult aspects about being a plaintiff lawyer, including the poor public image of plaintiff lawyers and the government's erosion of common law rights. APLA's work in these areas is vital.

'It's the only association set up spe-

cially to protect the rights of plaintiffs in Australia. Plaintiffs have a very unique set of needs which are different from defendants' needs.'

Despite the poor public image of plaintiff lawyers, she finds a great deal of satisfaction in her job.

She regards her work for the plaintiffs in *Cattanach v Melchior* at the trial and Court of Appeal levels as her most significant career achievement to date. Ironically, this case also brought her back in contact with the world of journalism.

Amid all the activity of representing plaintiffs, Catherine finds the most important aspect of her life is time spent with her husband, Robert, and daughters, Laura (4) and Genevieve (1). Weekends are for family and are rarely interrupted by work intrusions.

Although Catherine finds her work at Maurice Blackburn Cashman and her involvement with APLA stimulating, there have been times over the past 12 months, while grappling with recent legislative changes, when the thought of running a speech and drama studio in Toowoomba has had great appeal. ■