

Welcome ceremony for the Honourable Walter Sofronoff  
as the President of the Court of Appeal  
Supreme Court of Queensland  
Banco Court  
Thursday 6 April 2017, 9:15 am

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This ceremony is to welcome Justice Sofronoff as President of the Court of Appeal. I am afraid that the happy days when we could give a new Judge some time to settle in before swearing him in are over. In order to get his Honour onto the bench and hearing appeals as fast as possible, he was sworn in on Monday, in a private ceremony attended by all the members of the Court who could be present, and his wife, Ms Hoch, and his son, Sasha. So it is not strictly necessary that the commission appointing his Honour be read, but I will ask that it be done so that you can all hear it. Madam Registrar.

**Commission read.**

The three regional Judges, Justice McMeekin, Justice North and Justice Henry, join us by video link from their respective centres of Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns. There are also links in place to Mackay and Southport.

I note with pleasure among those physically present to welcome Justice Sofronoff: the Honourable the Attorney-General, Ms D'Ath, the Chief Judge and Judges of the District Court, Judges of the Federal Court, Family Court and Federal Circuit Court, the Acting Chief Magistrate and Magistrates, the President of the Land Court, members of the Industrial

Court, Tribunal members and retired Judges. Among the retired judges is a very important guest, retired President McMurdo.

Shadow Attorney-General, Mr Ian Walker, is unable to be present because of commitments in Townsville, but we have with us a former Attorney-General, and present Minister for Health, Mr Cameron Dick.

At the bar table, we welcome and acknowledge Mr Dunning, the Solicitor-General, Mr Hughes, President of the Bar Association, and Ms Smyth, President of the Law Society, and I welcome departmental representatives, members of community organisations, members of the academy and members of the public who have joined us in the Banco Court. As you can see, the Court is filled to capacity and then some.

And, of course, we welcome very warmly Justice Sofronoff's family and friends, in particular, Ms Hoch and Sasha, and his Honour's sister-in-law, Mrs Joy Sofronoff. Ms Hoch and Sasha, we look forward to your joining the court community. Ms Hoch, you have been known to most, if not all, of us for some time, but meeting Sasha has been a new experience for me, at least, and it is a great pleasure.

There are many apologies and expressions of regret from people unable to be present today: I will mention only these: the Chief Justice and Justices Keane and Edelman of the High Court are sitting in Canberra, and, thus, are unable to be present, while Justice Dowsett is overseas and very much regrets his inability to be here.

President Sofronoff, as Ms Smyth pointed out a couple of weeks ago at the valedictory for President McMurdo, you have big stilettos to fill. (It is a disturbing image, I know.) President McMurdo guided the Court with great distinction for almost 19 years, but there is uniform approval and enthusiasm for your appointment, in and outside the Court.

You have not exactly hurried to judicial appointment, lingering at the Bar for 40 years. It is nearly 30 years since you took silk. But you have performed a great deal of public service over your long career, occupying the position of Solicitor-General between 2009 and 2014, conducting a commission of inquiry into the Grantham flooding in 2015 and a review of the parole system last year.

And, of course, you already have experience presiding in a Court of Appeal, and not just an intermediate one. I refer, of course, to the Supercars National Court of Appeal. I have read your reasons for decision in the matter of Triple Eight Race Engineering v Confederation of Australian Motor Sport Limited. I am not sure how you cite that. Your Honour, in a succinct decision, which augurs well for future judgments, dismissed an application to amend a notice of intention to appeal against a finding of careless driving in the 2016 Supercheap Auto Bathurst 1000. It involved a nice point of construction of the relevant rules, and, may I say, you did not let any hint of your natural disapproval of people who drive fast cars fecklessly seep into your decision in any way.

More seriously, your appointment as President of the Court of Appeal is a very important one for the judiciary, the legal profession and for the public of Queensland. Very few Queensland litigants obtain special leave to appeal to the High Court. There were only seven last year, for example. So the Court of Appeal is really the final destination for almost all of the appeals brought from the District and Supreme Courts. You are only the third President of the Court of Appeal in its 25 year history, and you are fortunate enough to follow a leader in Justice McMurdo who set the court on a steady and effective path.

Your long legal career has fitted you superbly for this position. You have been one of those rare all-rounders in the profession, who can turn your

hand to anything, including, importantly for this role, criminal work, at trial level and appellate level, and perform it at a rare level of excellence. But there will also be the demands of increasing workloads, and the need both to develop new procedures and to identify and introduce any technology which might help in dealing with those demands. I am sure that, given your intellectual curiosity and adventurous spirit, you will meet those organisational challenges with zest.

On behalf of all the Judges, I congratulate Justice Sofronoff on his appointment as President of the Court of Appeal, and I welcome him to the Court.