

SUPREME COURT OF TASMANIA

Unveiling of a plaque acknowledging Aboriginal peoples on 4 November 2021

Speech of welcome by The Hon Alan Blow AO, Chief Justice of Tasmania

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people, the custodians of the land upon which these court buildings are situated, as well as the wider Tasmanian Aboriginal community and their Elders, past, present and emerging.

On behalf of the judges and staff of the Supreme Court of Tasmania I would like to welcome all the visitors who are here today. I am acutely conscious that that is a welcome to a building on land that was taken from the Muwinina people, and built largely with materials taken from lands of which the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples are the traditional custodians.

We are here today for the unveiling of a plaque to acknowledge the Muwinina people, their role as custodians of this land, the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples generally, and their rights as the first peoples of lutruwita, now known as Tasmania.

This ceremony is a recognition of the culture and experiences of the Aboriginal peoples of lutruwita. It is important for courts to recognise the traditional owners of the land on which our court buildings are built and operate. It is important to show respect to the traditional owners and their Elders past and present. It is also the Supreme Court's intention to commit to ongoing inclusivity and respect in its relationships with the Aboriginal peoples.

This Court has been hearing cases for 197 years, and it is 19 years since the Mabo case, when the High Court rejected the doctrine of terra nullius. In that case Sir Gerrard Brennan, the then Chief Justice of Australia, stated, "it is imperative in today's world that the common law should neither be nor seen to be frozen in an age of racial discrimination". These days all new judges receive a little training in relation to cultural awareness issues relevant to first nations people in the justice system. More significantly, a lot of work is being done by judges and magistrates at a national level through the Judicial Council on cultural diversity. Justice Helen Wood from this Court is a member of that Council. Amongst other things, that Council has published a National framework to improve accessibility to Australian courts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and migrant and refugee women.

As from today, there will be one of these plaques in the foyer of each of our Hobart buildings. Arrangements will be made for similar plaques to hang in Launceston and Burnie, after consultation in each of those areas. These are small steps, and perhaps baby steps, but very necessary steps.

The Supreme Court is also developing a Reconciliation Action Plan to guide the organisation, its judges and staff in dealing with Aboriginal cultural issues in the workplace and to embed the principles and purpose of reconciliation. We would like to receive suggestions as to the contents of this plan. We do not want to impose anything on anybody without consultation. We would therefore like to hear from any of you with suggestions for the purpose of improving knowledge, understanding and trust.

The Court aims to continue to deliver justice fairly, with no favourites, and to treat all who come before it with equality and respect.



Chief Justice Alan Blow AO with Ms Leah Cameron of Marrawah Law at the unveiling of the Aboriginal Acknowledgment Plaque in the foyer of the Civil Building on 4 November 2021.