

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5612

Webb, Raelene

(1951 -)

Born 1 January, 1951, Gawler South Australia Australia

Occupation Barrister, Chairperson, Lawyer, President, Public speaker, Queen's Counsel, Solicitor, Teacher, Tribunal Member

Summary

Raelene Webb QC holds a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Physics from the University of Adelaide and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Queensland. She was admitted to the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory and the High Court of Australia in 1992. In 2004, she was appointed Queen's Counsel. Prior to her five year appointment on 1 April 2013 by the Attorney General, as President of the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT), Raelene was named as one of the leading native title silks in Australia. She has appeared as lead counsel in many native title and Aboriginal land matters and has advised upon and appeared in the High Court in most land-mark cases on the judicial interpretation and development of native title/Aboriginal land law since the decision of *Mabo V Queensland (No 2)*.

Raelene became a fellow of the Australia Academy of Law in August 2013 and delivered the Annual Richard Cooper Memorial Lecture at the TC Beirne School of Law, University of Queensland, at the end of September 2013. She was a recipient of the 2014 Law Council of Australia President's Medal, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the legal profession in Australia.

On receipt of the award, Raelene encouraged other women thinking of taking risks with their careers to be brave.

'I marvel how it is that a shy country girl coming to the law in mid-life, finds herself here receiving this prestigious award and in the company of so many distinguished lawyers who have themselves contributed so much to the legal profession, both personally and through their work with the Law Council of Australia.

My advice to all who are contemplating scaling the walls of the legal profession, and particularly to women: be courageous, be bold, and above all, be passionate about the law.'

Go to 'Details' below to read a reflective essay written by Raelene Webb for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Project.

Details

The following additional information was provided by Raelene Webb and is reproduced with permission in its entirety.

Ms Raelene Webb QC holds a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Physics from the University of Adelaide and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Queensland. She was admitted to the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory and the High Court of Australia in 1992. In 2004, she was appointed Queens Counsel.

Raelene was born at Gawler, South Australia in 1951, the elder of two children of Ray and Joyce Webb. At that time her father was teaching at nearby Reeves Plains. Shortly thereafter Raelene's family moved to Batchelor in the Northern Territory where Ray had been appointed the first headmaster of the Batchelor Area School. Her family returned to South Australia in 1955 where Raelene commenced her education, graduating from Adelaide University in 1971 with a Bachelor of Science (Honours), majoring in physics.

Raelene then returned to the Northern Territory and taught at Alice Springs High School, transferring to Casuarina High School around 1972. Both of her sons were born in Darwin (in 1974 and 1977) but the advent of Cyclone Tracy led to a temporary relocation back to Adelaide in 1975. After returning to Darwin in 1976, in addition to managing several small businesses, Raelene also lectured part-time at the Darwin Community College in mathematics. She was then appointed Acting Head of Commercial Studies on a full-time basis, establishing an Education Program for Unemployed Youth at the College during that period.

After completing half of the Bachelor of Accounting Course at Darwin Institute of Technology, Raelene commenced law studies in 1986 externally with Queensland University. She continued to lecture part-time at the Darwin Institute of Technology in building science and mathematics, and then worked for 18 months as a management trainer/consultant with the Northern Territory Centre for Management Training.

In August 1989 Raelene commenced her legal career as an associate to his Honour Sir William Kearney, then Justice of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, before moving to the Department of Law (now the Department of Justice) where she commenced articles in 1991; also completed her Bachelor of Laws in that year. During 1990-1991 Raelene lectured for several semesters in Taxation Law for the Bachelor of Business course at the Northern Territory University, calling in aid her previous business/management and accounting experience as well as legal training.

Raelene was admitted to legal practice in the Northern Territory in 1992. From that time and until joining William Forster Chambers in March 1999, Raelene practiced, in effect, as a member of Counsel in Chambers with Mr Tom Pauling QC, the Solicitor General for the Northern Territory and Mr Graham Nicholson, previously Senior Crown Counsel and Constitutional Advisor to the Northern Territory Government. Her position as Crown Counsel was formalized in 1994 although she had been acting in that capacity since 1992.

As Crown Counsel Raelene gave legal advice to the Northern Territory Government on a wide range of complex legal matters, including administrative law, constitutional law, government contracts, torts generally and particularly liability of public authorities, medical negligence, mining law, native title and Aboriginal land matters.

The particular demands of Crown Counsel required that Raelene rapidly develop the advocacy skills necessary to research, prepare and present complex cases, many of which were destined to be finally determined by the High Court where Raelene made numerous appearances as junior counsel with the Solicitor General for the Northern Territory, and with other leading senior counsel, particularly in constitutional matters and later in native title/Aboriginal land matters. During her period as Crown Counsel, Raelene also deputised for the Solicitor General on a number of occasions at meetings of Solicitors General.

Raelene's move to the private bar in Darwin in 1999 allowed her to expand her practice, and she rapidly developed a national practice, appearing for and advising clients in most States and Territories. Between 1999 and 2011 Raelene practiced from William Forster Chambers. From 2009 she was Head of William Forster Chambers, before she left to establish Magayamirr Chambers in July 2011.

From 2010 to 2012, Raelene was President of the Northern Territory Bar Association, and a Director of the Law Council of Australia. She held the position of Honorary Treasurer of the Australian Bar Association in 2012 and was Vice President of that association in the following year, prior to her appointment. In 2011 Raelene was awarded a Board Diversity Scholarship and undertook governance training with the Australian Institute of Company Directors to assist her in these roles.

A significant part of Raelene's practice at the private bar was in the Federal Court and the High Court, first addressing a Full Bench of the High Court in 2001. In August 2001 the Honourable Justice Michael Kirby, in a speech to the Victorian Women Lawyers' Association, lamented the few speaking parts of women before the High Court in Australia, naming Raelene as one of only 6 women who had addressed the High Court from the central rostrum during his term of office. Over the next two decades, Raelene continued to argue matters in the High Court, advising upon and appearing in most land-mark cases on the judicial interpretation and development of native title/Aboriginal land law since the decision of *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* in 1992. Just prior to her appointment Raelene was named as one of the leading native title silks in Australia.

Raelene became a fellow of the Australian Academy of Law in August 2013 and delivered the Annual Richard Cooper Memorial Lecture at the TC Beirne School of Law, University of Queensland, at the end of September 2013. She was a recipient of the 2014 Law Council of Australia President's Medal, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the legal profession in Australia. Raelene is in great demand as a public speaker on a range of topics, native title matters especially, and has presented or chaired sessions at various conferences throughout Australia and internationally, including at the Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty held in Washington DC in March 2015. In April 2015 Raelene gave a number of public lectures at Canadian universities and was a guest speaker at the University of Northern British Columbia's

Published resources

Resource

Congratulations to President Raelene Webb QC, National Native Title Tribunal, 2014,
<http://www.nntt.gov.au/News-and-Publications/latest-news/Pages/award.aspx>

Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

Author Details

Raelene Webb (with Nikki Henningham)

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