

# Experienced Barristers Program

By Peter McGrath SC, Tim Castle SC and Sarah McCarthy



In October 2019, the Wellbeing Committee, in consultation with the Diversity and Equality Committee, launched the Experienced Barristers Program.

With changes to the way we all work, and with longer working lives, the Experienced Barristers Program was designed to engage with the increasing proportion of our more senior members, and their collective interests. It is well accepted that the opportunity to engage in meaningful work is a key wellbeing topic for all age groups, and past surveys have generally indicated a high level of satisfaction among experienced barristers with their work.

One of key attractions of a career at the Bar is that experience is always valued, as it is usually hard-earned through the successes and failures of running cases over many years. The Experienced Barrister Program seeks to recognise this valuable resource in a number of ways, for the benefit of the wider Bar and community, as well as for the ongoing benefit of the individual barristers.

The Program was launched in 2019 with a presentation ceremony for a number of barristers that had reached the career milestone of 50 years in practice at the Bar. This was followed by two lunches, at which Hon John Howard AC OM and Hon Murray Gleeson AC QC respectively were the guests of honour. Not only did these occasions provide much warmth and humour over recollections from prior eras, but importantly also, an opportunity for

older and younger barristers to get together in a collegiate way over a drink or lunch.

As at today's date, we have celebrated the following members who have achieved more than 50 years of service to the NSW Bar:

- Lionel Robberds QC
- Michael Robinson
- David Bennett AC QC
- Anthony Bellanto QC
- Dennis Wheelahan QC
- John Shaw
- Robert Stitt QC
- Peter Hennessy SC

Regrettably the pandemic put this part of the program on hold in 2020, but there are a number of members who are due to be honoured for having reached the 50 year mark, and it is hoped that the lunches will return again soon.

Equally important is the focus of the Program on providing opportunities for our experienced barristers to give back to the community. Two ways identified for this to occur are: by supporting law student mooting competitions, and through the development of an enhanced guide in relation to the Duty Barrister Scheme.

There has been much interest in the provision of judges for the many different law school mooting programs. In 2020 a successful pilot program was established with the UNSW Law School to provide judges

for their Senior Mooting Competition. The development of the NSW Bar as a source of expertise in moot judging is now in the hands of a sub-committee of the Wellbeing Committee headed by James Sheller SC.

It is expected that many more opportunities will arise in the future for experienced barristers to participate on judging panels to help develop the budding advocacy skills among law students, many of whom will be our future instructing solicitors and some of whom will be our future colleagues at the Bar.

The other service opportunity currently being developed is a comprehensive guide to make it easier for Experienced barristers, as well as all other members of the Bar, to volunteer to provide pro-bono legal assistance in criminal cases in the Local Court. Not only does the Duty Barrister Scheme, currently operating at the Downing Centre, provide a valuable community service by running cases for those in need, but it also offers the opportunity to provide mentoring assistance to younger barristers who are also rostered on that day with advocacy tips and guidance.

The Wellbeing Committee is always open to other ideas and suggestions for opportunities that may be suitable for our experienced barrister community, as this Program continues to develop in future years. **BN**

# Wellbeing in Chambers

By Cynthia Cochrane

Chambers at the New South Wales Bar tend to comprise around 40 floor members together with a clerk, one or more members of support staff and readers or licensees. Many barristers and judges have a life-long loyalty to their set of chambers. This model has been described by some external observers of the Bar as anachronistic, however, such criticisms overlook the important role of chambers in promoting collegiality and wellbeing at the Bar.

The unique series of stresses associated with being a barrister is well-documented. Analysis of Barrister Wellbeing and Quality of Working Life surveys shows that many barristers report high levels of stress, perfectionism and self-criticism. Many barristers also experience symptoms of vicarious trauma, particularly those practising in criminal or family law.

Chambers are well-placed to offer a community of support to barristers, in

particular because current and former members have an insight into the unique stresses of being a barrister.

An informal survey of chambers shows that the importance of fostering a sense of collegiality between current members of chambers is strongly ingrained. Breakfasts, lunches, birthday cakes and evening drinks with canapés are organised regularly in chambers. A number of chambers also hold regular events with former members of chambers.

Equally, the need to mentor junior floor members and licensees is recognised in many sets of chambers. Some clerks organise breakfasts or lunches to enable members of Senior Counsel or former floor members to mentor junior floor members and licensees. Some members of Senior Counsel provide direct mentoring to licensees by working permanently or temporarily from the annexe of their set of chambers. During the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020, senior

members of junior counsel mentored specific members of junior counsel on their floor.

A number of chambers promote collegiality and wellbeing among current and former floor members by organising activities outside chambers, including a biennial retreat in regional New South Wales, a quarterly cycling event followed by breakfast, a chambers band, annual cricket matches and an annual golf day.

Most chambers rely upon the Bar Association to organise activities directed specifically to wellbeing, such as yoga, sporting events and wellbeing information sessions, however, some chambers hold regular yoga sessions and wellbeing information sessions in chambers.

While practising as a barrister is uniquely stressful, an informal survey shows that many chambers take active steps to promote collegiality and wellbeing among their barristers. **BN**

