

The Hon Justice Jane Hamilton Mathews

The degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) was conferred upon the Hon Justice Jane Hamilton Mathews at the Law ceremony held on 27 October 2000.

Citation

I have the honour to present the Honourable Justice Jane Hamilton Mathews for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa).

Justice Mathews was made a judge of the Federal Court of Australia in 1994, but has held judicial office at both state and Federal levels since 1980. One of a select group of pioneering women jurists, she is unparalleled in the depth and range of the contribution she has made to the practice of law in New South Wales.

Her Honour was born in Wollongong and educated at Frensham school in the Southern Highlands. She studied law at the University of Sydney, and was admitted to practice as a solicitor in 1963. Six years later, Justice Mathews became one of the first women in New South Wales to go to the Bar, further distinguishing herself by specialising in criminal law. In 1977, she was the first woman to be appointed Crown Prosecutor. She is remembered for her outstanding ability to sort, assess and present facts in a simple, unbiased and ultimately just, manner. This deep understanding of fairness and due process made her a perfect candidate for judgeship.

Justice Mathews was the first woman appointed to full judicial office in New South Wales. She served as District Court judge between 1980 and 1987 before being appointed to the Supreme Court of New South Wales. With no female colleagues on the District Court, she also spent the best part of 7 years as the state's only female Supreme Court judge. She held concurrent appointments to the NSW Law Reform Commission as Part time Commissioner (1984-89) and as head (Senior Judicial Member) of the NSW Equal Opportunity Commission (1985-87).

In 1994 Justice Mathews was appointed to the Federal Court and assumed the Presidency of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) and Deputy Presidency of the Native Title Tribunal (1994 -1999). She was Deputy Chancellor of the University of New South Wales between 1992 and 1999 but throughout her career has maintained close ties with other universities.

A role model for the next generation, Justice Mathews has always been at the cutting edge of legal developments. Her early judgments in the Equal Opportunity Commission helped to create the first jurisprudence on disability and discrimination law in this state. Her experience left her passionate and often outspoken in her commitment to gender and racial equality, to tolerance and diversity. Hers is a career that required skills and knowledge across a daunting range of legal specialities. Her work in the Supreme Court saw her preside over both major criminal trials and civil actions that covered the spectrum from commercial law to civil injuries and tort law. On the AAT and at the Federal Court she added administrative law to her repertoire. In all of the many eminent positions she has occupied, Justice Mathews has drawn acclaim for her skills, her collegiality and her generosity of spirit.

Justice Mathews' unassuming demeanour masks a woman of great energy and courage. She has often found herself at the centre of controversy, but has never let the slings and barbs of detractors deflect her from pursuing a path of excellence and absolute integrity.

There have been few occasions where the judge's trademark grace and dignity have been disturbed. One was induced by a well meaning but baffled tipstaff in the early days of her appointment to the District Court, then housed in the St James' Building in King Street that was aptly nicknamed "the rabbit warren". The tipstaff insisted on leading the judge with great aplomb down one corridor after another, stopping finally before a great oak door. Rapping loudly three times and announcing in a **stentorian** voice "All stand", he opened with a great flourish of misplaced confidence the door to the men's toilets. For once in her life Justice Mathews did not know where to look or, for that matter, what to say.

Let no-one believe, however, that this extraordinary woman has but one focus in her life. Justice Mathews is also an Italian linguist, a distinguished patron of the Arts, horse breeder, gardener and an enthusiastic traveller. She was President of the Arts Law Centre between 1989 and 1994; and trustee of the AIDS Council of NSW. Her passions, for music and laughter, good company and good food, intellectual argument and an occasional joke, are most vividly demonstrated at the biennial Woolloomooloo Ring, where a dizzying array of Wagnerian recordings are played over several week-ends as her guests assiduously follow their libretti, or more intimidatingly the full score, and liberal quantities of red wine circulate as the partisans of various conductors, singers and mythological creatures debate the virtues of their various interpretations of the Ring Cycle. She regularly opens her house for concerts to raise money for impecunious but promising

young singers and musicians as well as for established music groups such as the Australia Ensemble, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and even the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting the Honourable Justice Jane Hamilton Mathews for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.