

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE5622

## Fryar, Karen Margaret

(1956 - )

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| <b>Born</b> | 1 January, 1956, Sydney New South Wales Australia |
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| <b>Occupation</b> | Lawyer, Magistrate, Solicitor |
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### Summary

When Karen Fryar was appointed as a magistrate of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Magistrates Court on 6 September 1993, she became the first woman to be appointed to the judiciary in the ACT. In 2008 she was awarded the ACT International Women's Day Women's Award. On 26 January 2010 she was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia 'for service to the community of the ACT as a magistrate and through contributions to the prevention of family violence'.

Please click 'Details' below to read an essay written by Karen Fryar for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Project.

## Details

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

Karen Fryar was born in Sydney in 1956, the eldest child, her father a fireman and her mother on home duties. She attended Albury High School (of which she was later School Captain) after her father was transferred to the NSW border town, and in 1972 spent a year as a Rotary Exchange Student in Japan, an experience that she describes as significantly influential for her future. Upon her return home she continued to study Japanese by correspondence for her HSC and had set her heart on studying the language at university. In 1975 she enrolled in a combined Arts (Asian Studies) / Law course at the Australian National University and in 1979 completed her Honours year in Japanese. In 1981 Karen graduated with a Bachelor of Laws (some years later she also achieved a Graduate Diploma in Public Law with Merit) and was admitted to practice in 1982.

Although she had previously assumed she would pursue a career involving Japanese, Karen took a position as an articulated clerk and then as a solicitor with a large Canberra firm of solicitors and fell in love with litigation. A few years in private practice (married a semi-local in the meantime), a short stint at the then Deputy Crown Solicitor's Office and she then moved to the Litigation Division in the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, the area that would subsequently become the Australian Government Solicitor.

During the 6 years she was engaged there, Karen worked on significant Commonwealth litigation including the last attempted appeal to the Privy Council (Commonwealth v Finch (1984)155 CLR 107) and the attempt by Queensland to have the proclamation under the World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983 concerning the Daintree Rainforest declared as invalid (Queensland v Commonwealth (1989)167 CLR 232) and with such eminent lawyers as (the former Solicitor General) Gavin Griffith QC, (the former Chief Justice of the Federal Court) Michael Black QC and Justice Stephen Gageler (of the High Court)).

From 1989 to 1993 Karen was the Assistant Executive Officer of the Legal Aid Commission (ACT) and during her employment there she also held an appointment as a Deputy President of the Guardianship and Management of Property Tribunal.

Karen was appointed as a magistrate (and coroner) of the ACT Magistrates Court in 1993, being the first woman appointed to the judiciary in the ACT. At this time her youngest (of three) daughter was only 4 months old. In 1994 she was also appointed as Deputy President of the Mental Health Tribunal. As a magistrate she has regularly presided over matters in each of the court's civil and criminal jurisdictions, including matters that in other jurisdictions would normally be heard in District or County Courts.

From 2000 to 2010 (and subsequently since 2014) Karen presided over the dedicated Family Violence list of the court and played a supervisory role in the ACT's award winning Family Violence Intervention Programme, which had been independently evaluated as "world's best practice" for its co-operative criminal justice inter-agency approach to the ongoing issue of family violence. Pursuing her interest and leadership in this area, from 2005 Karen was also an active member of the National Leadership Group for White Ribbon Day in Australia. Karen has also regularly lectured at the College of Law at the Australian University and the University of Canberra on such subjects as Advocacy, Sentencing, Court Practice and Procedure, Criminal Law, Court Etiquette, Family Violence and Therapeutic Jurisprudence. She continues to be sought after as a speaker on such issues as gender balance and family violence.

Karen has been the Children's Court Magistrate in the ACT since 1 March 2010, work that she finds challenging but extremely awarding. In this role she deals with young people charged with all manner of criminal offences, and also applications in the care and protection jurisdiction. She has been responsible for a number of initiatives in this area, including a Youth Drug and Alcohol Court to assist with young offenders and their substance abuse problems in the Children's Court. During this period Karen has been a member of the South Pacific Council of Youth and Children's Courts.

## Published resources

### Report

Honour for ACT magistrate, Pohl, Katherine, 2010,  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-01-26/honour-for-act-magistrate/308842>

### Site Exhibition

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

## Author Details

Karen Fryar

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