Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5743

White, Margaret J.

(1943 -)

Born	19430604, Hamilton Victoria Australia
Occupation	Academic, Barrister, Chairperson, Commissioner, Judge, Jurist, Lawyer, Naval officer, Solicitor

Summary

The Honourable Margaret J. White was, in 1992, the first woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court of Queensland. Prior to coming to the Queensland bench, she enjoyed a distinguished academic career, first in South Australia and then in Queensland after she moved there in 1970. She retired from the bench in 2013.

In between her South Australian and Queensland ‘phases’, White instructed senior naval officers of the Royal Australian Navy in international law and the law of the sea. She was commissioned as Second Officer, thus becoming the first Women’s Royal Australian Navy Reserve officer to be commissioned since the end of World War Two.

Details

Margaret White was educated at the Cabra Dominican Convent, Adelaide and graduated Bachelor of Laws at the University of Adelaide in 1966. Her early career in Adelaide was an academic one; she worked as a research assistant to Professor D.P. O’Connell several times during the 1960s, as a research assistant to the state succession committee of the International Law Association, Geneva (1965-66), and as a consultant to the governments of Guyana, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago in relation to their pre-independence treaties (1966-67).

She met Michael William Duckett White while working for the Royal Australian Navy; they married in September 1970. The couple had three sons and one daughter. From 1970 to 1982, White was a senior tutor and lecturer in the TC Beirne School of Law at the University of Queensland, the first of a distinguished groups of women, that included Quentin Bryce and Patsy Wolfe, to teach there in the 1970s.

On 18 July 1978, White was admitted as a barrister of the Supreme Court of Queensland. In 1983, she commenced full time practice at the bar in Brisbane. On 5 March 1990, White was appointed a master of the Supreme Court of Queensland.

On 2 April 1992, White was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court of Queensland, the first woman to achieve the honour. She served as the chair of the Supreme Court library committee (1999 – 2003), a member of the advisory committee to the Australian Law Reform Commission on the Judiciary Act 1903 (Cth) (1999 – 2002), a foundation fellow of the Australian Academy of Law (2006) and a member of the visiting committee for the Bond University Law School (1993 – 2003). She was also a member of the University of Queensland senate (1993 – 2009) and deputy chancellor of the University of Queensland (2006 – 09) receiving an honorary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Queensland in 2005. White was appointed to the Queensland Court of Appeal on 15 April 2010.

She was the first member of the revived WRANSR in 1968 and served as a commander in the Royal Australian Naval Reserve (2002 – 10) and deputy president of the Defence Force Discipline Appeal Tribunal (Cth) (from 2008). She was on the Board of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Chair of the Queensland Selection Committee from 2006 and National Chairman from 2011. She was awarded the Centenary Medal in 2003.

In 2013 White was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia ‘for distinguished service to the judiciary and to the law particularly in Queensland, as a leading contributor to legal education and reform, and to professional development and training’. She retired on 3 June 2013.

Published resources

Book Section
Margaret White, Gregory, Helen, 2005

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

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