

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5923

Triggs, Gillian Doreen

(1945 -)

Born 19451030, London United Kingdom

Occupation Academic, Barrister, Director, Lawyer, Solicitor, Teacher

Summary

Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs held the positions of President of the Australian Human Rights Commission (2012-2017) and, since 2012, Vice-President, Administrative Tribunal of the Asian Development Bank. Prior to taking up these appointments she served as dean and Challis Professor of International Law, Faculty of Law, University of Sydney (2007 to 2012) and as director of the British Institute of International and Comparative Law (2005 to 2007).

Details

In 1958 Gillian Triggs, then aged 12, emigrated with her parents and sister from post-war north London, where she had attended the local convent and was enjoying studying ballet, to Australia. Her father had been a major in the British Army and her mother a Wren (member of the Women's Royal Navy Service).

Triggs attended University High School and the University of Melbourne, where she was crowned Miss University in 1966 and graduated with a Bachelor of Laws in 1968. In 1969 she was admitted to practise as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

A scholarship took her to Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, where she obtained a Master of Laws in 1972 and worked for the Dallas Police Department, interpreting the civil rights legislation for the Chief of Police. She returned to the University of Melbourne in 1976 and undertook a PhD in territorial sovereignty which she was awarded in 1982. She then travelled to the Antarctic where she spent just over two months under the auspices of the Australian government's Antarctic Science Advisory Council.

Between 1996 and 2005, Triggs was Professor of Law at the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Law; she served as director of the Faculty's Institute for Comparative & International Law and also for the Centre for Energy & Resources Law.

Triggs has had a long association with the law firm Mallesons Stephen Jaques (now King & Wood Mallesons), where she was Senior Counsel (International Law) in Singapore (1990-1993); Paris (1993-1996); and Melbourne (1996-2005).

She is the author or co-author of a number of books, chapters of books and articles concerned with such areas of law as environmental law, human rights, international law and the law of the sea.

During her presidency of the Australian Human Rights Commission she was frequently in the media. She received criticism from the Abbott Government for the timing of the release of the report prepared by the Commission in 2015: *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention*. In response she received significant public support, including a censure motion, passed in the Senate against Attorney-General George Brandis over his attacks on her as the president of the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Triggs is married to Alan Brown AM, the former Australian diplomat. Triggs was previously married to Melbourne law professor Sandy Clark, with whom she had three children.

Triggs was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in January 2025 for eminent service to humanitarian and human rights law, to international relations, to social justice advocacy, and to tertiary legal education and research.

Published resources

Resource Section

The Year That Made Me: Gillian Triggs, 1958, 2015,

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/sundayextra/2015-05-10/6456554>

Meet Gillian Triggs, the woman taking on Immigration Minister Scott Morrison, Elliott, Tim, 2014,

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/meet-gillian-triggs-the-woman-taking-on-immigration-minister-scott-morrison-20140510>

Alumni Profiles, Melbourne Law School: The Human Rights Commission - Gillian Triggs, 2014,

<http://mag.alumni.unimelb.edu.au/2014/05/20/the-human-rights-commissioner-gillian-triggs/>

Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

Author Details

Marina Loane and Larissa Halonkin

Created 17 August 2016

Last modified 11 August 2025