



TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS  
*Fair Work Act 2009*

**CEREMONIAL SITTING OF THE FAIR WORK COMMISSION  
TO WELCOME COMMISSIONER THORNTON**

**Adelaide**

**9.00 AM, WEDNESDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2023**

PN1

JUSTICE HATCHER: Good morning, everyone. Before we begin I would like to acknowledge the Kurna people, the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging. This ceremony today is for the purpose of acknowledging the appointment to the Fair Work Commission of Commissioner Thornton.

PN2

I welcome her family, the speakers at the Bar table and all the other guests present. I will now ask Mr O'Connor from the Workplace Relations Legal Division of the Department of Employment & Workplace Relations, who importantly is representing the Minister, to address the Commission first. Mr O'Connor.

PN3

MR O'CONNOR: May it please the Commission. I begin today by also acknowledging the Kurna people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, and pay my respects to their elders, past present and emerging. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

PN4

I am honoured to be able to be here today representing the Australian government on behalf of the honourable Tony Burke MP, Minister for Employment & Workplace Relations. Minister Burke apologies for being unable to attend in person to welcome Commissioner Emma Thornton.

PN5

I would also like to acknowledge your Honour, the President and all Members of the Fair Work Commission and representatives from the community, industry and trade union movement here today. I want to welcome and acknowledge you, Commissioner Thornton, and your family members on this significant occasion.

PN6

The Fair Work Commission was established over 14 years ago. This Commission and its predecessors played an invaluable role in shaping Australia's workplace relations landscape for over 100 years. Throughout that time the functions and remit of this institution have grown and evolved to match the social, economic and legislative changes of our society. This landscape has changed as our nation has changed.

PN7

Now that the Fair Work legislation covers the majority of Australian workplaces the decisions of this Commission have more broad ranging impact than ever before. These decisions are felt in every home. They are felt in every workplace. As Minister Burke said in April when he was welcoming Justice Hatcher as President of this Commission, there are three key differences to when this body was first established.

PN8

It has new objectives and powers, new plans to deal with fresh jurisdictions, and new expectations from the Australian community. The Commission's work will be more important than ever as the government progresses ambitious workplaces relations reforms to lift wages, improve job security and close loopholes undermining the pay and conditions of workers.

PN9

In particular, gender equality and job security are now for the first time mandated objectives of the Fair Work Act that must take into account on decisions that you'll oversee. It is an historic change. The Commission is required to perform functions and exercise powers under the Fair Work Act in a manner that is just and fair, open and transparent and in a way that promotes harmonious and co-operative workplace relations.

PN10

Minister Burke is absolutely determined that the Commission will continue to perform its functions in this way under the government and I'd echo that sentiment today.

PN11

Commissioner Thornton, you bring to the Fair Work Commission wealth of knowledge and experience in workplace relations and law, having worked in private practice and the trade union movement over the last 20 years. You started your legal career in 2001 as a telephone legal advisor at the Legal Services Commission in South Australia.

PN12

In 2002 you joined the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in Sydney as a law graduate as part of a graduate program before becoming an Associate to Commissioners. The following year you became a co-ordinator at the Young Workers Legal Service at SA Unions where you represented young workers not in unions, in employment matters before various industrial tribunals and courts.

PN13

In 2005 you joined private practice becoming a solicitor at Lieschke & Weatherill Lawyers in Adelaide, and also became a sitting member of the Grievance, Disputes and Mediation Committee at the Training & Skills Commission which determined disputes between trainees and apprentices, and their employers to registered training organisations.

PN14

In 2008 you were appointed as an assessor in the Industrial Relations Commission in South Australia where you provided expert advice and exercised decision-making with the Commission sitting in their jurisdiction under the *Training & Skills Development Act 2008*. Leaving private practice in 2010 you took up a role with the Australian Council of Trade Unions in Melbourne.

PN15

As an Industrial & Legal Officer at the ACTU you worked with affiliate unions on the Social & Community Services pay equity case. You also wrote and delivered advocacy training for union officials across Australia and worked on policy

development across a broad range of workplace relations matters. These include unfair dismissal, delegates' rights, occupational health and safety, and vocational education and training.

PN16

Commissioner Thornton, you bring strong leadership skills to this role having held senior leadership positions in various private practices. In January 2012 you became a Senior Associate at Maurice Blackburn Lawyers in Brisbane where you co-ordinated large litigation matters. These were primarily in the Federal Court of Australia.

PN17

You were second in charge of the practice team and Acting Team Manager for over a year and a half. Five years later in 2017 you returned to Adelaide at Lieschke & Weatherill Lawyers' as a Senior Associate. There you continued to co-ordinate extensive practice in all aspects of employment law and workers compensation litigation, as well as supervise junior solicitors.

PN18

In 2018 you became Office Leader & Senior Associate of Maurice Blackburn Lawyers in South Australia and a Director of Maurice Blackburn South Australia. In that role you managed the South Australian office and continued to manage and varied practice in employment law, workers compensation and other matters, providing advice and representation to clients and litigation in the Supreme and District Courts and the South Australian Employment Tribunal.

PN19

Most recently in 2020 you joined Johnston Withers Lawyers as Practice Leader in Employment & Industrial Law. In this role you were involved in all aspects of practice management and strategic planning while continuing to provide legal advice and advocacy for clients across a broad range of employment and industrial law matters.

PN20

You led strategic industrial litigation for clients with involvement in all levels of dispute resolution from informal negotiations to complex litigation. Throughout your career you have built strong skills in dispute resolution and demonstrated a commitment to conciliation and negotiation to identify common interests and compromise solutions as an alternative to all or nothing litigated outcomes where appropriate.

PN21

Commissioner Thornton, with your strong leadership skills and extensive experience and background and workplace relations law, and dispute resolution I am confident you will execute your duties with impartiality and diligence. The government has made clear that for the Commission to work as intended it needs to be properly balanced.

PN22

The government is delivering on its promise to restore balance to the Fair Work Commission to give workers an equal voice (indistinct) to employers in decisions

that affect them. Your Honour, great responsibility is placed on Members of the Fair Work Commission. The balance and fairness of the system depends on the integrity, judgment and skills of members of the Tribunal and its team leaders.

PN23

If they are to discharge their responsibilities effectively they require the goodwill, understanding and co-operation of the parties, employers, employees and their representatives. I trust this will be forthcoming from all concerned to Commissioner Thornton.

PN24

In conclusion, Commissioner Thornton, on behalf of the Australian Government I congratulate you on your appointment as Commissioner of the Fair Work Commission. I have no doubt that you will make an important contribution to the work of the Tribunal for years to come. I convey our goodwill and wish you well in the exercise of the responsibilities of your office. Thank you.

PN25

JUSTICE HATCHER: Mr Beasley, Secretary of SA Unions on behalf of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

PN26

MR BEASLEY: Thank you, your Honour. May it please the Commission, I want to acknowledge from the outset that we are meeting today on Kurna country and pay my respects to elders, past and present, this was and always will be Aboriginal land. I am here appearing for Sally McManus, the Secretary of the ACTU who couldn't be here, but as the Secretary for the local branch of the ACTU, it is a great pleasure to be here speaking to you.

PN27

Ceremonies have been held on country by the traditional custodians for thousands of years. It is the longest continuous culture in the world and I think that is important for us to reflect on, particularly today as we hold this important ceremony to welcome the newest Member to the Fair Work Commission.

PN28

I would like to acknowledge your Honour and all of the other Members of the Commission, as well as Mr Luke O'Connor, as well as Ms van Gorp and Ms Abbey Kendall (indistinct). It is a pleasure to welcome someone who is a highly qualified and exceptionally capable woman to the Fair Work Commission. The union movement commends the government on making balanced appointments to ensure that the Commission has a fair representation of those with life experience representing workers and those representing employers.

PN29

We also commend the government on its progress for making the Commission more reflective of today's workforce which is now 48 per cent female. So, from one millennial to another it's good to see us starting to take over.

PN30

I have known Commissioner Thornton for over a decade. Our careers have brought us together in uniquely Adelaidean ways with me now leading the United Trades and Labour Council where you the first started the Young Workers Legal Service, and despite a life long commitment to workers rights from providing support and advice to young workers at SA unions but also building a career at Johnston Withers, Maurice Blackburn, Lieschke & Weatherill, advocating for, amongst others, for victims of workplace injury, all the way through to your efforts to ensure that workers are able to lead a dignified retirement through your work in industry superannuation.

PN31

The people you have worked with over this time speak of your empathy, your determination and dedication to the people you represented. These things have made you a great lawyer and a great person which is also recognised by Doyle's Guide.

PN32

I recently spoke to one of Emma's former colleagues and they spoke of her unwavering commitment to two things, her daughter Violet and to workers that she represents. Your iron-willed determination ensures that neither settle for less and it is present in your unmatched work ethic. Early mornings, late nights, weekends, you'll do whatever is necessary to make sure that the people you are representing were never let down.

PN33

I'll leave further commentary on your contributions to the legal profession to my colleagues but suffice to say that you have been a legal practitioner of diligence and dedication, giving back to your profession wherever you can. Your work contributions have always been of sterling quality, thoroughly considered, highly intelligent, based in your vast experience working with and for workers.

PN34

The emails that I and the other union officials have received from you on matters at ungodly hours of the night and morning are testament to your dedication though of course, I would advocate that work practices that expose such psychosocial risks are not acceptable but it speaks to the common affliction of those in our movement that we rest when the job is done; and the job is never done.

PN35

Your family was involved in social justice which is what led you to become involved in campaigns with other young workers around precarious employment. You strongly believe in the inherent dignity that work provides, but that also workers often need someone in their corner when their work life takes more than it gives. Your personal experience of workplace illness and death is what led you to the vocation in industrial relations.

PN36

Your advocacy and representation of victims and sufferers of occupational lung diseases in particular, increasingly silicosis, is notable and again demonstrates conviction and commitment borne out of personal experience. As many as one in four stonemasons have contracted silicosis and on current trends 100,000

Australians will contract this incurable disease which causes lung function impairment, as well as lung cancer and death.

PN37

As Australia sees this shocking emergence and increasing prevalence of silicosis, workers have been fortunate to have had you supporting them and advocating for them.

South Australians have also been extraordinarily fortunate to have had you overseeing worker's capital as a board member and director. Your experience in industrial relations and change management in assisting organisations to grow, develop and rejuvenate has helped to chart good strategic directions for our super funds, particularly Statewide Super and Host Plus.

PN38

I think it's hard to distil the impact of a career like yours, the impact that it has had on the lives of working people over so many years. Hundreds, probably thousands of individual lives and the lives of the families of those workers have been changed for the better, and even when things haven't always gone their way, having an advocate that is there in the corner is life-changing in itself.

PN39

I want to acknowledge the other union leaders who are here in the room because you've changed our lives, as well. This institution is core to the efficient and effective functioning of Australia's industries and workplaces, having an independent balanced umpire that has the faith and confidence of employers and employees and their various representatives is essential.

PN40

On behalf of the trade union movement I can say that you absolutely have our every confidence and I'm certain you will make an outstanding contribution to the Commission. May it please the Commission.

PN41

JUSTICE HATCHER: Thank you. Ms van Gorp for Business SA on behalf of Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

PN42

MS VAN GORP: Thank you, your Honour. If the Commission pleases, I do appear on behalf of the South Australian Employers Chamber of Commerce & Industry Business SA, representing the Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry. I wish to begin by acknowledging that we are convening on the traditional lands of the Kurna people and I extend my deepest respect to their elders, both past and present, and to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander attendees here today.

PN43

I would like to acknowledge those Members of the Fair Work Commission who are before me and representatives of the industrial organisations at the Bar table with me. And of course, I acknowledge our newest Member, Commissioner Thornton and her family and friends who join us today.

PN44

The Fair Work Commission is deeply entrenched in Australia's socioeconomic landscape and plays a pivotal role in bridging the interests of businesses and employees, ensuring that both prosper together. In difficult economic times the Commission's role is magnified. It needs stable and strong minds to keep Australia's economy moving.

PN45

Today it is my privilege to introduce such a mind, Commissioner Emma Thornton, to the Fair Work Commission. Commissioner Thornton, your 20 year journey as an industrial, employment and personal injuries lawyer began not just with the pursuit of a profession but a vocation. The intertwining of personal experiences reinforced your dedication to the union movement and instilled in you a deep passion for social justice and workers rights.

PN46

Your belief in the inherent dignity of every individual in their professional life and its seamless extension into retirement highlights your holistic approach to workers rights. Your focus on conditions like silicosis, drawing parallels from personal encounters underscores your continuous fight to ensure workers' wellbeing, especially those who have been exposed to harmful environments without adequate protection.

PN47

Commissioner Thornton, as you embark on this new chapter with the Fair Work Commission you bring with you not just years of experience but a drive to make Australian workplaces better. On behalf of the Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry and employers generally, we look forward with optimism knowing that under your guidance we will continue to champion the rights of workers, ensuring a productive and fair industrial landscape in Australia that balances the interests of employers and employees. If it please the Commission.

PN48

JUSTICE HATCHER: And Ms Kendell from the Australian Labour and Employment Relations Association South Australia.

PN49

MS KENDELL: Thank you, your Honour. I wish to firstly acknowledge that the land we meet on today is the traditional lands of the Kurna people and we respect their spiritual relationship with their country. I also acknowledge the Kurna people as the custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still important to the living Kurna people today. I pay my respects to their elders, past and present, sovereignty was never ceded and this is Aboriginal land.

PN50

I welcome the President and other Members of this Commission who are in attendance this morning and our other distinguished guests. I particularly welcome and acknowledge Commissioner Thornton and the members of her family who have come here to mark this significant and special occasion.



PN51

I appear today in my capacity as the President of the Australian Labour & Employment Relations Association of South Australia, perhaps more familiar to some as the Industrial Relations Society of South Australia. I am also the director of the South Australian Working Women's Centre.

PN52

It is in my capacity as leader of both of these organisations and because Commissioner Thornton is a sister that I am honoured to welcome her. I want to particularly mention Violet, Commissioner Thornton's daughter, of whom I know will one day come to realise and beam with pride at the intellect, passion, decency and character of her mum.

PN53

Commissioner Thornton has had a lifelong membership with ALERA, having become a member in 2002 and working across South Australia and Queensland. Commissioner Thornton's membership and intimate involvement is a testament to her passion and dedication to the law, community, education and of course, industrial relations.

PN54

The objective of ALERA is to foster an environment that brings together professionals from all areas of industrial relations to learn and to grow together with the interests of improving workplaces. This is clearly why Commissioner Thornton has had such a long affiliation with ALERA because I know that she cares deeply about fair outcomes for working people and is a lifelong learner.

PN55

I was privileged enough to hear Commissioner Thornton speak at a recent seminar where she spoke of the importance of collectivism in industrial relations and working in solidarity. Commissioner Thornton is not interested in charity. She is interested in community building, independence and skill sharing. She is fair and thinks deeply about outcomes for working people and in particular, working women.

PN56

Commissioner Thornton has a long history with the Working Women's Centre and I know she is focused in improving outcomes for working women. She has dedicated countless hours as a board member and supporter of the centre. Commissioner Thornton has always had the centre in mind in all of her ventures and she has used her feminist networks to ensure that the centre and all those that work there prosper.

PN57

Commissioner Thornton has been particularly supportive of me and by example, shown what it means to be an activist and a feminist in the IR space. Commissioner Thornton has always brought her legal expertise and prowess to the centre but really what was most important was her feminist politics.

PN58

Commissioner Thornton and I have had many arguments. We have debated well into the night and on most occasions we come back to each other and tell each other that we've convinced each other of their points. It's actually quite frustrating. Commissioner Thornton is a fierce intellect and we are privileged to have her in this important role. Working women are better off for having Commissioner Thornton in this position. I congratulate you and welcome you on behalf of ALERA.

PN59

JUSTICE HATCHER: I'll now invite Commissioner Thornton to speak.

PN60

COMMISSIONER THORNTON: Thank you. And thank you for all the wonderful comments made by the speakers today. Every young worker is worth more than all the gold in all the world, which is a reflection of Joseph Cardijn, a leader of working people in the movement of the YCW, and that's where I began my journey. This philosophy of the deep human dignity realised by working people through their work has served me throughout my working life and steered me to a life of purpose and vocation in my work.

PN61

I had the privilege of starting out my journey as a part of a movement of activists who believed in making the world better and in particular, every person's experience at work better through their own daily actions to do good, and this shaped my entire working life. Work is how each person contributes to the world around them. It's how they use their skills, minds and labour to shape their world and to meaningfully contribute to their own advancement and the improvement of the world around them.

PN62

It is a significant way in which people leave their mark, build social connections and realise their potential as humans. Almost everyone works in some fashion, paid or unpaid. And I have always believed that people ought to be able to do that with dignity, fairness and in safety. My work in, with and alongside the union movement has been a deep privilege and honour.

PN63

When I started out in my professional working life it was with a single minded goal to contribute my skills to the worker movement. I have been extremely blessed to work in a community of like-minded people whose goal is to make life better for others because it is right and because it is just.

PN64

The union movement fights for a progressive, inclusive society for all people and I am so grateful to the movement for the sense of purpose I have always derived from my work and for an opportunity to do that work amongst good people. The union movement has always supported me, lifted me up and offered me the best of opportunities.

PN65

In offering my thanks to the many people who contributed to my journey, a number of whom are in the room and watching online today, it will give you some insight into my past to this role. I thank my friends in the YCW who were there in the very beginning and who taught me how to take challenging action to change the world immediately around me. They will remain my life-long friends. My activism in the YCW led me to focus on joining the union movement and when I realised working as an organiser or a campaigner was one of the hardest jobs out there I focused on how I could contribute in another way.

PN66

With my mum's encouragement I ended up studying law and realised that those skills are how I could contribute to the union movement. One day I was volunteering on some kind of a phone survey of young workers and their experiences which was being conducted at the Working Women's Centre, still located in Station Arcade, and I was lucky enough to be on that phone line with Colleen Ross who was the Industrial Officer at the Working Women's Centre.

PN67

I had actually just been rejected for my practical legal training placement at Lieschke & Weatherill Lawyers and I was at a bit of a loss as to what I might do to make some contacts in the movement and how I could develop relationships with union aligned law firms. And so, on that day I had my first of many experiences of a woman in the union movement who said to me, 'Leave it with me, I will help you.' And she proceeded to open doors for me.

PN68

Colleen reached out to Jay Weatherill and the next thing, I was doing my placement at Lieschke & Weatherill with the Working Women's Centre and the Finance Sector Union, and Colleen has now been my friend for 22 years and I'm very pleased that she's here today. And that also started my very long association with the Working Women's Centre.

PN69

Before I graduated from law school I decided I wanted to learn industrial relations from the top down and I had my interview for a job at this institution, then known as the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, by phone to Sydney actually at the Working Women's Centre during my placement.

PN70

I moved to Sydney in January 2002 to start on a graduate program at the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. I remember my mum ringing up Robin Godfrey who was my supervisor on the graduate program, and then later the registrar in the Sydney Registry to ask if it was safe for me to live in Kings Cross.

PN71

I did live there and it was safe. And I had a wonderful time working at the Commission and walking up and down Williams Street every day to my flat which was in the street behind the famous Kings Cross Coca Cola sign. Robin gave me one of the best experiences I've had in my career of a warm and

supportive manager, and he stayed in contact with me for the 20 years since I've left the Commission.

PN72

I loved my work at the Commission and I was so very lucky to then work as an associate to Commissioners Greg Harrison and Frank Raffaelli. I was delighted when they both called me when my appointment was announced, and I think they are watching today from Sydney. I learned so much about industrial relations and the way the system worked in my time at the Commission and I could not have got a better start in this field of work.

PN73

But after some time I do remember the day that Commissioner Raffaelli was hearing a particularly difficult matter that ultimately ended up in the High Court and I was discussing with him the merits of the union's case. I remember him saying to me, "Take whatever time you need but it's time for you to go and work in the union movement because that's clearly what you want to do." And he gave me that gentle push out of the nest.

PN74

I then packed up and returned to Adelaide to take a chance working at SA Unions, supporting small unions with their industrial work but primarily to start industrial advice service for young workers. Janet Giles who was then secretary of SA Unions was the next woman in the movement to open the door for me and she offered me a job without even meeting me, and that was the start of a beautiful working relationship.

PN75

Janet was the firecracker inspiration for a whole lot of dynamic work that instilled me with drive and energy and I executed the plan. The Young Workers Legal Service came to life 20 years ago next week, on the first Tuesday in November 2003.

PN76

Of all of my work I am most proud of Young Workers Legal Service. It existed for 17 years and not only assisted innumerable young workers, trainees and apprentices, but it inducted and trained a new generation of young lawyers who chose the movement or working for working people as their career. A number of them are here today and in fact, Patrick North who took on my role at Johnston Withers when I moved into this role, was in that first intake of volunteers 20 years ago, next week.

PN77

My friend, Matt Windsor also started around that time and now he is the preeminent practitioner representing people dying of dust diseases at Johnston Withers. They were just some examples of the young lawyers who have, following their experiences at Young Workers Legal Service worked in the movement or labour, law firms for their careers. I enjoyed working with those young workers so much and I am so pleased and proud of their contribution to the lives of working people.

PN78

I thank Graham Warren for mentoring me closely in this time for his support of the young workers we worked with, and I also thank Greg Stevens who supported my work at Young Workers Legal Service and became a life-long friend and mentor at that time. At the same time, I also met Les Birch who a lot of you in the room will know, and who has been my mentor for much of my career, always encouraging me to keep up the energy for the work over a lifetime, and I thank him for his continued and unwavering support.

PN79

After two and a half years at the Young Workers Legal Service Steven Dolphin, now Justice Dolphin, President of the South Australian Employment Tribunal, asked me to meet with him at Trades Hall and offered me a job at his firm. I had not really seen myself working in legal practice but Lieschke & Weatherill was the preeminent place to work for labour lawyers in this state.

PN80

So, I took the plunge into private practice and it put me on a path whereby I've spent most of my career working in labour law firms who act for working people. Justice Dolphin generously mentored me and taught me how to practice law. He also taught me all he knew about negotiation and I've never seen a better negotiator. That time working with him was so formative and crucial to the rest of my working life. He taught me about staying on top of the high workload at the practice.

PN81

He always said, "Don't let the wave crash down on you, keep on top of the wave." And the glass wave from the Jam Factory that he gave me when I left the firm has sat in front of my computer on each desk of each job I've had since, including this job, and I thank him for his contribution and mentorship in my career.

PN82

At Lieschke & Weatherill I also met other friends who I have had the honour of working with over my career, Bernadette Mulholland and Simon Blewett. They have each done so much for me at the firm and to this day I thank them for their contribution to my working life that's continued for 20 years.

PN83

Bernadette became another union woman to support and open doors for me in her current role at the Salaried Medical Officers Association and Simon has consistently been a voice of reason, wise counsel and calm as I returned to practice in South Australia in 2017 and he was called to the Bar in the same year.

PN84

After almost five years at Lieschke & Weatherill I decided to go interstate in an effort to practice exclusively in employment and industrial law. I won a role as a legal officer at the ACTU in Melbourne and in this role I was exposed to the workings of the union movement at its highest level and had the once in a lifetime opportunity to work on the ASU's pay equity case in the social and community services sector.

PN85

I wrote a 20,000 word history of the awards in the sector nationally and I actually enjoyed it. I was an honour to make a small contribution to that landmark case and that case stoked the fire of my feminism as I came to better understand the nature of the work predominantly done by women in social services and the devaluing of women's work that has contributed to pay inequity.

PN86

In that role I also really enjoyed writing a course about advocacy in industrial tribunals, drawing on my time on the Commission and flying around Australia working with union officials to train them in their own advocacy and it was a very key time in my career.

PN87

Then unexpectedly I was approached about moving to Brisbane to work at Maurice Blackburn Lawyers. My first thought was that Brisbane was far to far from Adelaide but something pulled me north and it turned out to be the best five years of my life. Terri Butler was the next woman to take a chance on me and open the door for opportunity for me.

PN88

I managed the Employment & Industrial Law Team when Terri was on parental leave. And when she returned, she continued to offer me leadership roles, opportunities and support and I thank her very much for the trust that she had in me. Terri also taught me an enormous amount about the discipline of private practice and my time in the Brisbane team of Maurice Blackburn really elevated me to a senior lawyer.

PN89

I also made so many friends in the firm at that time. The Queensland union movement welcomed me with open arms and invited me with warmth and celebration. Many of my friends from Queensland are watching online today and my wonderful friend, Kelly, has travelled here today for the ceremony from Melbourne. Kelly is another union woman who showed me unconditional support and solidarity.

PN90

I had my daughter, Violet, in 2016 as a single mother by choice, and my family rightly told me it was time to return to Adelaide. But I had to be torn away from Brisbane. I came back to Adelaide to raise my daughter amongst her family and it seems to have worked out well for both of us. I was ultimately invited back to Maurice Blackburn to lead their Adelaide office.

PN91

Whilst this period of my career took me away from my first love of industrial law it returned me to the honourable work of assisting workers injured at work or in other accidents. It reignited my commitment to assisting workers greatly affected by work injuries which impact every aspect of their lives.

PN92

In this role I was able to return to Maurice Blackburn, a firm that I've truly loved working at, but I also had one of the best experiences of my career working with a tightknit and caring team. Jess, Ric and Tayla are here today and I thank them and Casey for the care and support they continue to give me.

PN93

The next union woman to open the door for me was Abbie Spencer, Secretary of the Australian Services Union, and the union in which I was a member for 20 years. Abbie asked me to take up a union appointed position on the board at Statewide Super which I held for four years. It was one of the best professional opportunities of my career and took me into the brand new world of industry superannuation.

PN94

I sat on the board, learning more than I ever anticipated about governance in a member focused organisation. I cannot thank the ASU enough for the opportunity and the trust they had in me, and to Anne McKewan and Ken Williams in particular who mentored me in that role.

PN95

Johnston Withers Lawyers came along in late 2020 to offer me the role of leader of the employment and industrial law practice at just the right time. I was able to return to practice in industrial relations, acting for working people in a firm steeped in activist history. I was honoured to join the firm started by Elliott Johnston, a communist activist and union lawyer who went on to be appointed a QC, a Supreme Court Judge and then a Royal Commissioner.

PN96

Elliott influenced progressive society in South Australia and was a giant in the law, pushing boundaries in the pursuit of justice. I was lucky enough to meet and interview him in 2005 for a young unionist project that became a book called Movers and Shakers that was focused on retired activists in the state. Our recorded interview remains in the State Library.

PN97

It felt full circle to finish my career in legal practice at Johnston Withers. I thank the directors of Johnston Withers for taking a chance on me, and for the firm for welcoming me and enabling me to reconnect with the kind of legal practice, in the kind of place with the kind of clients that I really care about. The firm also went along with me when I ran education sessions about the history of Elliott Johnston and the firm and it was very hard to leave them. I thank many of them for being here today.

PN98

I also would like to thank and acknowledge many of my colleagues and friends at the Bar who are here today. They have each given me enormous support to make it through the pressure of private practice and done so with kindness, grace and friendship. In particular, I thank Simon Blewett, Paris Dean, Jarrod Warren KC, Chad Jakobi KC, Ted Guthrie and Eloise Theodore.

PN99



I have been a member of the Working Women's Centre Board over a number of years as earlier advised and I acknowledge the work the centre does for vulnerable women workers. The centre has been an important part of my work in industrial relations and I thank them for their work and support of me.

PN100

And in particular, I thank Michelle Hogan, Chair of the Board from 2017 to 2023, who I worked with very closely.

PN101

Michelle passed away in March this year and I really miss her vibrancy and her friendship.

PN102

I also acknowledge and thank a number of women here today who were my opponents in legal practice but who understand me and always offered friendship and solidarity. You do an amazing job. There are also great women here today who I am honoured to have had as friends for many years; my best friend, Ursula, who I hope is watching from London, my friends, Emily and Claire. Thank you for your love, generosity and inspiration.

PN103

I also want to thank the women who did so much work to support me in legal practice, the legal assistants who often go un-thanked and unnoticed and unnamed, so I particularly want to thank Kirsty, Megan, Casey, Tayla, Monica, Madeline, Rebecca, Zoe, Angela, Danielle, Joanne and Sarah. I couldn't have done it without you.

PN104

I also want to thank my now associate, Ebony, who has worked very hard to set up my chambers and to organise today, and to the other associates of the Commission who assisted today.

I also want to acknowledge the joy I have experienced in supervising and mentoring other lawyers in my career. I have learned so much from you and have been enriched by my work with you. And this includes all the lawyers at Young Workers Legal Service and other lawyers in private practice, in particular, Rachel Smith, Patrick Turner, Darcy Collett and Lawrence Ben.

PN105

And now to my family, without whom none of this would be possible. I thank my Aunt Cathy who is here today. Thank you for the inspiration to lead and change, and do everything in the spirit of community building and kindness, always in the service of others. My sister, Amy, who gives me enormous support in being able to work and contribute beyond my work life to other things. She has also given me the most wonderful gift I have ever had of co-parenting her children. She has shared my values and commitments to progressive causes and I thank her for that.

PN106

My mother, Margaret, who is here today is the most wonderful person I know and she has made everything possible. She has given me the support to live my life



where and how I have chosen to live it, and my happiness is attributable to her. My mum supported every decision and every move I have made other than when I wanted to be a hairdresser - she wouldn't let me do that.

PN107

She has given unconditionally, to interstate moves, late nights of work and raising children. I am indebted to her for everything she's done for me and I hope I can be as giving a parent as she has been to me. I also acknowledge my dad who made a contribution to my union politics.

I am so proud of my daughter, Violet. She is the best thing that's ever happened to me. She is already a climate activist and a force for change. Raising her has been my greatest joy and I look forward to our lives together.

PN108

I thank the Minter for Industrial Relations, the Honourable Tony Burke for this appointment, to my fellow newly appointed colleagues from around the country who have been a wonderful support, to the President for travelling to Adelaide and attending this ceremony, the other Members of the Commission who have reached out and offered their welcome and support, and to my Adelaide Member colleagues who have been fabulous, and much more fun than I anticipated. Thank you for your help and your wisdom that you have given so generously.

PN109

I promise to work hard in offering assistance to industrial parties to reach outcomes and resolve problems. The importance of the role and the work performed by the Commission is not lost on me and I offer my full commitment to the important work done by this institution. Thank you to everyone who has attended today in person and online. Your support is so valued.

PN110

JUSTICE HATCHER: On behalf of all my colleagues I would like to congratulate Commissioner Thornton on her appointment and to thank her for agreeing to serve with us. I thank all of those who have attended today, both the speakers at the Bar table and those who have come here as guests, and we will now adjourn.

**ADJOURNED INDEFINITELY**

**[9.55 AM]**