



Australian
Bar Association

The ABA acknowledges the relationship between the land on which it and its members work and the First Nations' peoples of Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

5 May 2020

VALE PHILIP ALAN SELTH OAM

The Australian Bar Association mourns the passing of Philip Selth, former CEO of the Australian Bar Association and Executive Director of the New South Wales Bar Association, who died on 3 May 2020.

Philip was the long-serving and dedicated Executive Director of the New South Wales Bar Association from November 1997 until October 2016. Prior to taking up his position at the New South Wales Bar Association he was the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Administration) at the Australian National University having had a distinguished career in public administration before that.

Philip's involvement in the ABA commenced in April 1998. Whilst he was formally appointed CEO of the ABA in February 2015, he had previously provided several years of service, leadership and support to the ABA. Philip had the foresight to recognise the imperative for a strong, independent national bar and that integral to this was the central role the ABA could play, both in terms of representing members of the Bar nationally and also in developing policy and a law reform agenda. Perceiving what was required to bring this about, he became a driving force for constitutional change to the ABA to achieve the necessary renovation and modernisation of its governance and activities. In recognition of his enduring high service over many years, he was honoured with Life Membership of the ABA in 2016.

Philip was instrumental to the introduction of the National Australian Bar Association Rules, describing the settling of these as constituting one of his proudest achievements throughout his long career. Regarding them as a crucial step in the recognition of an 'Australian Bar', Philip strongly believed that the pursuit of their development and enhancement are 'properly the role of the profession, not one to be picked up by default by some government agency'. He maintained a lofty perception of the role of the profession in a democratic society, its independence being essential, and accordingly placed a very high importance on the profession's development of these rules, the backbone of its ethos. This informed his advocacy of a national profession and, to secure its achievement, he was at the forefront of the development of the Uniform Law including ensuring the ABA's statutory role of recommending a member of the Legal Services Council to the Attorney-General.

In his role as Executive Director of the New South Wales Bar Association, and recognising the toll of the unrelenting challenges facing barristers, he championed the establishment of BarCare. BarCare is an integral part of the Bar community providing assistance to barristers who are experiencing difficulties in their professional or personal lives. Also amongst his proudest work, there is, no doubt, many a barrister and their family who remains extremely grateful for service that was derived from foresight and compassion. For, while barristers are almost always the support for others amidst the unpredictable vicissitudes of litigation, they often neglect to protect their own well-being. Recognising the importance of such an initiative, similar schemes have since been created in some other states. Recently, working with the local bar associations, the ABA rolled this out nationally to help members through the current COVID-19 crisis.

To say that Philip was dedicated to his work for the Bar is an understatement. He described himself in *Justinian* just prior to his retirement as a 'Grumpy old workaholic'. He immensely enjoyed working for both the New South Wales and Australian Bar Associations, an enjoyment that flowed from the many friendships he had formed at the Bar, coupled with his sincere and deeply held reverence for

the rule of law along with a deep conviction that essential to its maintenance, and to the administration of our system of justice, was the existence of a flourishing independent referral Bar.

Philip was always generous with his encyclopaedic knowledge of all things to do with the Bar nationally and the ABA as an organisation. He was welcoming of newcomers, encouraging of them to find their place, to feel at home and make a contribution. He was possessed of a wicked sense of humour and it was always a pleasure to be in his company. He inspired great loyalty from those who worked for him and who were fortunate to be mentored by him.

Philip was highly respected by all branches of the profession, not any easy respect to achieve. Perceiving that at the core of the profession was service to the public, he was passionate about access to justice and the right to representation. He was a great servant of the Bar. If ever he was able to contribute or help, he was always willing to go out of his way to assist. No job was too large, or too small for him. He was that man you could rely on to source a spare jabot for a nervous new silk at the silks bows' in the High Court or the person who had the courage to have difficult conversations with politicians or the heads of jurisdiction on behalf of the Bar, its sure and certain champion. His email address says it all: @pleasefixall.

Philip is survived by his wife Frances and son Alexander. Throughout his career he made an enormous and invaluable contribution to the national Bar and the ABA for which we are very grateful. He will be sorely missed by the profession.

Vale Philip Selth

On behalf of the Council of the Australian Bar Association

MEDIA ENQUIRIES: Greg Tolhurst: ceo@austbar.asn.au