



## ERNEST (ERNIE) SCHMATT AM PSM 1948–2024

It is with great sadness that I share news of the passing of Ernest (Ernie) Schmatt AM PSM, former long time Chief Executive of the Judicial Commission of New South Wales.

Ernie held senior legal and management positions in the NSW public sector before being appointed Deputy Chief Executive of the then newly-established Judicial Commission of New South Wales in October 1987. Ernie was appointed Chief Executive in 1989, a position he held for over 30 years until his retirement in February 2022.

Under his careful leadership, early judicial misgivings about, and indeed positive resistance to, the Judicial Commission gave way to its widespread acceptance. This was in part achieved by reason of his positive focus on the Commission's judicial education function which had peer-leadership and judicial independence as the key elements. Also established and maintained under his leadership were a series of now indispensable Bench Books which contribute significantly to procedurally fair, technically accurate and informed decision-making. All of that was underpinned by the Judicial Information Retrieval System (JIRS) which has also become an indispensable tool in the administration of criminal justice in New South Wales.

Ernie leaves an enduring legacy with an organisation often described as the "Rolls Royce" of judicial education bodies. The Judicial Commission has been a model for similar organisations both at home and internationally. On the eve of his retirement from the High Court in 2008, the Hon Murray Gleeson AC described the Commission as "the leading Australian institution in this field ... [which has] won substantial international recognition and acclaim".

Beyond the Commission, Ernie contributed significantly to educating judicial officers both in Australia and abroad, having been elected to the Board of Governors of the International Organization for Judicial Training (IOJT) in 2009, appointed to the IOJT Executive in 2011 and Deputy Secretary General of the IOJT in 2021. He was a member of the Advisory Board of the Commonwealth Judicial Education Institute from 1994 and served on the management committee of the Asia Pacific Judicial Reform Forum. He was involved in judicial capacity-building programs in China, Indonesia, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Philippines, Turkey, Papua New Guinea, West Bank and Gaza, work that was instrumental in the propagation of the rule of law.

Ernie Schmatt became a Member of the Order of Australia in 2018 for significant service to the law in the field of legal education and review and through the use of technology to assist the judiciary. He was awarded the Public Service Medal in the 1997 Queen's

Birthday Honours List for service to public sector management and reform, public sector industrial relations and judicial education in NSW.

I acknowledge and salute the life and work of a dedicated public servant who was foundational in establishing the Judicial Commission of New South Wales as an essential adjunct to the New South Wales judiciary and the administration of justice in this State. He was meticulous in his work, proud of the institution with which he was so closely associated, and a man of the utmost courtesy and care. My condolences are extended to his wife Helen and his family.

**Andrew Bell**  
**Chief Justice of New South Wales**

**26 February 2024**