



**Court of Appeal Ceremonial Sitting at the Bendigo Law Courts
Remarks of the Hon. Chief Justice Ferguson
Wednesday, 5 April 2023**

Thank you. Good morning everyone.

On behalf of the whole of the Supreme Court of Victoria, as Chief Justice, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we stand, of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Djaara people, and also the lands on which those joining us remotely are located.

I too celebrate their connection to this land, to Country, to culture, knowledge and stories.

I pay my respects to their Elders and knowledge holders and leaders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people who are present today or watching online.

It is a real pleasure to be at the Bendigo Law Courts with my colleagues from the Court of Appeal; on my right, Justice Emerton, President of the Court of Appeal, and on my left, Justice Osborn, also a member of the Court of Appeal.

I would like to thank each of the previous speakers for your words and thoughts; Rodney Carter, for Welcoming us to your Country; Mr Hay KC and Ms Smith. It is truly wonderful to hear from people involved in this new Court complex.

Thank you also to the staff here at Bendigo for accommodating us today. We have been welcomed warmly.

I would also like to acknowledge other members of the judiciary, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the legal profession and the community present in court and watching on the livestream.

The purpose of this ceremonial sitting is to mark the first time that the Supreme Court is sitting in this new building.

Congratulations – and the Court's congratulations – goes to everyone involved in the Bendigo Law Courts Development. The entire community can be immensely proud of this new regional landmark. It is not an overstatement to say that it is an extraordinary achievement.

From the Court's perspective, I would particularly like to thank Court Services Victoria and the members of the Steering Committee that oversaw this development. In addition to her membership of the Steering Committee, Regional Coordinating Magistrate Aumair, who is based in Bendigo, also chaired the Transition Working Group for the operational implementation. I want to thank Magistrate Aumair and the other steering committee members for their work and dedication. I specifically acknowledge and thank Justice Osborn for the energy he has committed as a Steering Committee member in addition to his work as a judge. His wisdom, pragmatism and lived experience were invaluable to this project.

Bendigo is one of 12 regional districts that the Supreme Court sits in, being a court for the state of Victoria, not just a court for Melbourne. It's a city that has developed considerably since its Pall Mall-based courts were built in the 1890s.

With its growing population, it is important that the Bendigo and Loddon Mallee communities have access to the services they need in a modern, responsive and culturally sensitive space.

The last three years have thrown unexpected challenges at all of us; we have had to adapt to changing circumstances, somewhat rapidly; we have had to innovate; and we have had to build flexibility into ourselves and into our workplaces.

My message today is that we must keep moving forward. We must continue to ask ourselves how we can improve and what we can do better; differently.

The courts are no exception. They must respond to the changing needs and expectations of users and people in the community. The Bendigo Law Courts, this new building and its operations, reflect this.

For a start, this ceremonial sitting is being publicly livestreamed. Livestreaming is just one example of technological innovation which has played a significant role in increasing access to justice and enabling people to see the work of the courts. The importance of accessibility and flexibility cannot be understated, particularly for regional communities like Bendigo that are not located in one central place.

The new courts are also multi-jurisdictional. They will service the Magistrates' and Children's Courts and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, as well as the Supreme Court, County Court and Federal Circuit and Family Court on a circuit basis. It will also provide specialist courts for the Koori community and for family violence, and an assessment and referral court for drug and mental health matters.

Going to court can be stressful, confusing, and a foreign experience, especially for people who are unfamiliar with the legal environment. Legal problems seldom materialise without

other problems, whether they are health-related, financial, cultural, social, or otherwise. We must remember that the people we see in court are not just the professionals who are at work; they are often facing hardship and feeling overwhelmed by the legal process.

The aim of these law courts is to create a space which supports the people and organisations who use them. We can see this in the open plan design and natural lighting, the safe waiting areas, and the ability for parties to remain separate from each other.

The operating model here means that regardless of which court someone is attending, they will have access to services in spaces that are calm, secure, and comfortable, and importantly, located in one place.

The building is architecturally significant; its design reflects the culture of the Djaara people and Bendigo's much more recent heritage as a mining town.

Every day, many of those passing by or entering the courts will see the spectacular design of Bunjil, the ancestral creator and knowledge keeper, on Bendigo's skyline.

Once inside, Bunjil's silhouette, along with the other beautiful artworks by Djarra artists, stand as symbols of the Dja Dja Wurrung's unbroken connection to land, to community and culture. The Djarra language is used to name more than 40 meeting rooms, courtrooms, mediation rooms and other spaces throughout the building.

These references and connections are integral to the setting in which justice is delivered. They shape the experience of the community when interacting with a legal environment.

The opening of the Bendigo Law Courts marked a new era for the delivery of justice.

This court complex has been designed as a modern court should be; by listening to and looking through the eyes of the users; with systems that work together; and in a calm environment that fosters the best outcomes that justice can deliver.

Inevitably the needs and expectations of users and the people in the community will change with the times.

What does not change is the promise we make each day when we open the court; that people will be heard. That is what happened in the design and development of this building.

Upholding our promise to listen means that courts must continue to evolve so that we can serve the community to the very best of our ability.

The Supreme Court of Victoria continues to look for ways to improve the experience of going to court. The environment here at Bendigo is one part of that improvement. Over the

coming months and years, I look forward to seeing the delivery of open, accessible, quality justice for all in this building.

I now invite the President of the Court of Appeal to address the Court.

The Hon. Chief Justice Anne Ferguson
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Victoria
5 April 2023