



Ceremonial sitting at the new Shepparton Law Courts

The Hon. Chief Justice Anne Ferguson

Remarks of the Hon. Chief Justice Ferguson at the ceremonial sitting to mark the first Supreme Court sitting at the new Shepparton Law Courts, Shepparton.

Monday 16 April 2018

Thank you. Good morning everyone.

On my own behalf and on behalf of the Supreme Court of Victoria, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

It is such a great pleasure to be at the Shepparton Law Courts this morning with my colleagues Justice Osborn, on my right, and Justice Beach, on my left, from the Court of Appeal. We have said it before but I am going to say it again this morning - the Supreme Court is the Supreme Court of **Victoria**, it's not just the Supreme Court of Melbourne. As judges, we want to visit regional Victorian courts and we want to work out of them and, with the necessary financial support, we will continue to be able to do that.

I'd like to express the Court's thanks to Pat Cummins and the staff here at Shepparton for accommodating us today. Everyone has made it very easy for us to be working here and has welcomed us warmly.

Can I also thank the previous speakers, Bobby Nicholls, Dr Collins and Ms Gurney. They've each expressed views about this court complex from a unique perspective. They have captured beautifully how important this building is to the local community and to Victoria.

The purpose of this ceremonial sitting is to mark the first time that the Supreme Court is sitting in this important new building. Congratulations to all those who have been involved in the Shepparton Law Courts Project, particularly those from the local community. It is a tremendous outcome which could not have been achieved without the co-operation of all involved, their dedication to the project



and a willingness to be flexible and adaptable. From our Court's perspective, I would particularly like to thank Justices Osborn and Riordan and also Judge Mullaly. They each put a lot of time and energy into seeing this project through to completion, in addition to their usual judicial workload.

In Court today, there are judicial officers from several Victorian jurisdictions, representatives of the many sectors of the legal profession, court staff and members of the public. This is notable because the work that will be done in this building will involve all aspects of our judicial system with the clear aim of serving the needs of the Goulburn Valley community.

To meet the expectations and needs of the community, a modern court facility must go beyond delivering justice through the fair and efficient resolution of legal disputes. Courts must be designed with the user in mind. So I ask rhetorically, who are the court users? They are the many and varied people who will come through the doors of the Shepparton Law Courts, to work, to attend court, and to visit, every day for many decades to come. This new complex was designed around and focused on their needs. The end product is a testament to the benefits of looking at things from the users' perspective and a tribute to the skill of the architects.

The Shepparton Law Courts embodies two qualities that I believe are critical to a modern court.

The first is the integration of services. Technology plays an important role in this, and this Court clearly embraces technological advances. However, integration goes beyond technology. The reality is that legal problems are almost invariably accompanied by, or complicated by, many other issues. These issues are often of a social, health, or financial nature. People who come before the courts carry these complicating factors with them. In recognition of this, the Shepparton Law Courts incorporate comfortable and secure spaces available for use by the range of clinical, legal and voluntary service providers that operate within it.

The second quality of a modern court I want to speak about is openness. That justice should be open and accessible should go without saying. But what does that mean? In part, openness and accessibility is about the physical building and surrounds. Everyone in court this morning will have passed through the light-filled public spaces, despite the grey sky. The building provides a calm



space for people to feel protected and secure. It is filled with light, open spaces and it's welcoming – something that's not always associated with court buildings. This is an important human response to the stress, fear, anxiety and vulnerability that many court users feel. The design also reflects what a court should be in a functional sense. It plays a part in delivering open and accessible justice.

In short, these Law Courts are a place where people can enjoy working, where they can feel safe, and where they can see for themselves the changing face of justice.

Yes, these Law Courts are a spectacular new architectural landmark. Perhaps more importantly, the new complex is a wonderful example of a contemporary building that better enables us to perform the work we do as modern courts in Victoria.

As we've learnt from our earlier speakers, there has been a dedicated court house in Shepparton since the 19th century. This illustrates the long and rich history of this region and the importance of Shepparton to the Goulburn Valley. The new complex, while I imagine very different, is an important continuation of this history and tradition. It is a building of which the entire community should be immensely proud. The community can look forward to the second stage of the project which includes the development of a new landscaped forecourt and the refurbishment of the 1930's courthouse.

Again, I congratulate all involved in bringing these Law Courts to life. It is a significant achievement. Over the coming months and years, I look forward to seeing the delivery of open, accessible, quality justice for all in this wonderful built environment.

Adjourn the court, please.