

# FERAE NATURAE

## A lawyer for all seasons

With the announcement of the appointment of a new Governor General, it's worth taking time to mark the career of Sir William Deane in his last few months in office.

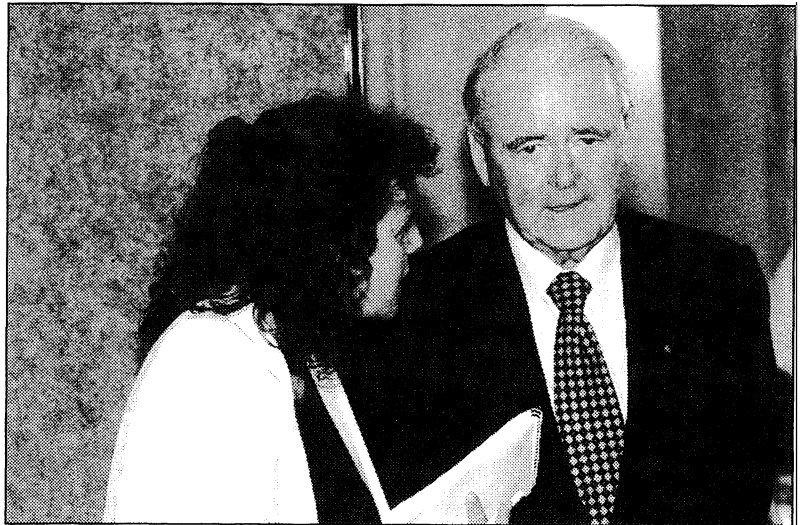
Why? Because he has much to commend to the legal profession, of which he was such a prominent member, until taking his vice regal role in 1996.

His legal career is the stuff of Who's Who: a judge of the NSW Supreme Court and Federal Court, before 13 years on the High Court bench. But it's the way he brought his legal training and experience to the governor generalship that has made him unique in our nation's history. It has been an incumbency that has transformed the nature of an office that has at times been notorious, no less in these days of republican sentiment. He's probably the only governor general many republicans would be happy to see as president!

We've had our fair share of lawyers occupying our highest office, from the controversial appointment of the first Australian Governor General, Chief Justice Isaac Isaacs, through to John Kerr, Zelman Cowan and Ninian Stephen. A high court chief justice, with a couple of judges from the same bench; a supreme court chief justice; and a senior academic. Quite impressive amidst the minor British politicians and aristocrats and retired Australian pollies that have also held the office.

But — with respect — none have achieved the same sense of solidarity with the broad Australian community as has Sir William Deane.

At memorial services at Port Arthur and Thredbo, Interlachen and Anzac Cove, he managed to capture the nation's sorrow — in much the same way as his personal "sorry" to the Stolen Generations was a direct response to the grief experienced by so many Indigenous Australians. The gentleness, compassion and common humanity demonstrated by Sir William and his wife Helen have touched the lives of many Australians.



*Executive Officer Maria Ceresa with Sir William Deane*

Although a devout and practising Catholic, he has nevertheless injected a necessary level of ecumenism to the role. He was among the first to offer support and sympathy when the Anglican Church in Parramatta was burnt to the ground; and he has enjoyed strong connections with Jewish and Muslim groups alike. He has been a friend of all faiths rather than one — crucial in a multicultural society such as ours.

He has always been a welcome — and knowledgeable — visitor to the Northern Territory. In a deeply moving gesture a couple of years ago, Sir William returned a *maak*, or message stick, to the late Djutjadjutja Mununggurr, the eldest and then only surviving son of 1930s Djapu clan leader, Wonggu. It was a message stick, carried back to Darwin by anthropologist Donald Thompson, that led to the freeing from Fannie Bay of three of Wonggu's other sons — it was one of the earliest recognitions of customary law. Sir William described it as "one of the most rewarding experiences of my life".

It was an event that reflected Sir William's profound respect for history, justice and the rule of law, a sentiment that he has done much to promote in recent years. He has brought a fundamentally human face to the place of a lawyer serving civil society. He has combined the best of both worlds. As a jurist he served the law; as a governor general he has served the community.

The idea that lawyers serve the

community is at the heart of this year's Law Week. The theme, "Safer Communities", has been taken up nationally and by the Northern Territory and focuses on the way lawyers contribute to community well being. It is for this reason, among others, that the Attorney General will open this year's Law Week at Casuarina Square rather than in a formal setting.

A highlight of the week in Darwin will be the Safer Community Expo at the Square following the Week's launch. A wide range of community and legal groups will contribute to displays as well as to a series of seminars on Monday 14 May at the Casuarina Library and in Alice Springs Mall on 15 May at lunch time.

Keep an eye out for the poster that gives a run down of this year's law week activities including self defence classes, a crime tour and various seminars.

I urge all lawyers to get behind Law Week — it is a time to put your best foot forward.

### **Important notice**

The Law Society of the Northern Territory requests that all legal organisations who remove a legal practitioner from their insurance policy, advise the practitioner in writing that this has occurred.

This will assist legal practitioners in meeting their obligations to ensure that they hold insurance for the entire period that they are practising law in the Northern Territory.