

# Leanne Turner FM interview



*UNLIKE THE CHANGES AT SUPREME COURT OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, THE ARRIVAL OF THE NEW FEDERAL MAGISTRATE FLEW UNDER THE RADAR. BARBARA BRADSHAW AND SUZIE SIMMONS WENT ALONG TO THE FEDERAL MAGISTRATES COURT TO INVESTIGATE.*

Following a low key ceremonial sitting on 29 June 2010, and a couple of aborted attempts to meet with the Law Society, it was one day in late August when a relaxed and chirpy FM, Leanne Turner, welcomed the party from the Law Society into her office with a cheery smile.

Having been in Darwin for a few months now, initial impressions of the city are very favourable with this Queensland lady who is 'just loving the place', the fresh air, brightness and the casualness. That said, the lingering mosquito situation in the Court that had not been rectified by fumigation, was perhaps starting to wear a little thin.

Now a few weeks into the position, FM Turner is pleased that she had not identified any major issues in Court, as yet. For the time being she plans to observe the functioning of the Court with it's daily running remaining unchanged from that of the previous FM.

Her main concern is practitioners running on Darwin time and so arriving late; an issue that she has already found it necessary to speak of in Court. The court is busy and it throws things out if people are late. Generally however, she thinks they are a good bunch.

Her biggest beef is seeing practitioners who are not working in the best interests of their client.

"People think I can be a little terse in Court, and I can; but that is because practitioners have not taken instructions from their clients, and do not do their job."

She was brought up in the old school where Masters and Judges would throw things at practitioners if they turned up to Court not having done their work.

When asked about any discernable differences between the Territory and other jurisdictions in which she has worked, the response was very clear.

"No. I think the problems in the Territory are the





*A sometimes emotional Ceremonial Sitting took place on the morning of Tuesday 29 June 2010*

same as elsewhere in Australia. Family law can touch anyone any time. It does not matter what race, background or education you have.”

As far as the Court is concerned, it does not matter where you are sitting. It is appealing to come to a Registry where she is the sole Magistrate as she likes working in her own space. “I have not changed much but I might” she said. “I have just had a week in Adelaide and spent time with other Federal Magistrates.”

Born in Northern Queensland but having lived in Brisbane since she turned three, there was no burning ambition to go into law.

Back in 1977 in high school, students were given a package which listed university degrees and told to make a choice. Whilst going through the list she saw Law and thought that might be interesting

and so started at Queensland Institute of Technology. It was a lot of fun as they were just starting out and had new ways of doing things; it was a really good course.

FM Turner became a solicitor in 1984 and always dabbled in family law until 1993. She then went to Legal Aid until 1998 when she decided that it was time to specialise in either criminal law or family law and she decided on family law because it touches so many peoples lives. She became an ICL in 2003.

Her interests outside of the legal system had to take a back seat whilst in Brisbane, but this is about to change.

“My last position was Co-ordinating Registrar in the Federal Court in Brisbane and I worked very long hours for over five years so did not get to do the things I like and had to put them

to one side. Since arriving in Darwin I make sure I go out every weekend. I like to go on a mystery drive and I hope to take up reading again. I have joined a local book club I have left my family behind; it is the first time I have been on my own. I understand I will be away about once a month but my priority will be Darwin.”

FM Turner’s first circuit is coming up in September in Alice Springs. She hopes to go to Alice once every three months; we are currently doing video links.

So, what are her future plans for the Court?

“Presently I am doing the best I can for the Bench. I hope I can develop and be the best I possibly can, and in doing that, perhaps the profession can take some of that on board and develop that as well. I am in the unusual position of having my own Territory to myself. I want to make sure there is a just and speedy service.”

“I am here for the long term; I have made Darwin my home.” ●

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